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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

How Many More Will Die?

The murder of a homeless woman in Santa Barbara challenges the conscience of a community

Only 15 shelter beds exist for women in Santa Barbara. Where could the murdered woman have gone? Yet we persist, madly, in our attempts to forbid and criminalize public sleeping and camping, as if the homeless had other choices.

by Peter Marin

Editor: A homeless woman was raped and beaten to death near Highway 101 in Santa Barbara on August 16. A sleeping ban ticket was found near her body. An acquaintance said she was forced from safe sleeping spots by police enforcement of the sleeping ban. Peter Marin, a long-time advocate for homeless people's rights, wrote this reflection after her death.

How many deaths will it take? How many rapes? The news on Sunday was grim. A woman — a "transient," the police and journalists say — was found dead by the highway, nude from the waist down. She was later identified as Linda Louise Archer, 43. Police have arrested another "transient," Gregory Vincent Gavin, as a suspect in the murder.

I thought, as I watched the news, of a friend, a woman who was homeless for two years and is now a student at the University of California at Santa Barbara. She was raped twice while on the streets, once in Isla Vista and once in Los Angeles. She feels the sleeping laws in both cities, and the way they were enforced, were responsible, in part, for the rapes.



"The police roust you," she says. "They did it in Los Angeles. They do it here. They do it when they find you sleeping, or when you gather with friends, or when you find a place you feel is safe. At night you have to hide, or you wander by yourself, or they find and wake you and tell you to move, and there you are, wandering at night, all alone."

I don't say the woman killed by the roadside died the same way. But for years now in Santa Barbara I've heard similar troublesome stories from homeless men and women with nowhere safe to go at night and forbidden by the city to sleep in

See **How Many More** *page 14*

THE FOOT

by Claire J. Baker

If I hadn't slowed by the same bush,
I wouldn't have seen Christoph's foot
sticking out again, gotten up courage
to talk with him; drove his
wracked body to the Clinic:
under tired rags, a poetry professor
before the leg amputation
and too much pain-killer wine.

He's Whitman, staggering under juice
happily shared by Dylan Thomas
while Allen Ginsberg howls at another
best mind gone down.

Mistreated Children at Metropolitan State Hospital

by Ted Chabasinski

"Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are people who want crops without plowing up the ground... Power concedes nothing without a struggle. It never has and it never will."
— Frederick Douglass

This is a very personal account, because I spent most of my childhood in a state psychiatric hospital in New York. I was released from Rockland State Hospital 43 years ago, at the age of 17. I had spent 10 years there. I went on with my life, struggling with the effects of what had been done to me. I worked my way through college, got married, became an attorney.

I never forgot what happened to me at Rockland, but I never had to look this experience in the face again. Until now.

A few months ago, as an advocate for the Office of Patients' Rights, I was asked to go down to Los Angeles and assist the regular advocate at Metropolitan State Hospital. Early in June, 1997, many children had been transferred to Metro from Camarillo State Hospital, where most of the kids in the state hospital system had been. Camarillo, a prime piece of real estate in a beautiful setting, is being closed. The facility is being sold to developers.

Half the children shipped to Metro are African American, about a third are white, 15% are Latino. Virtually all, as one would expect, are from poor or broken families. The overwhelming majority are sent by Los Angeles County, which has purchased many beds from the state for children in its charge who "need long-term care." One third are girls, two thirds are boys.

Into this virtual death camp of the spirit, Los Angeles County and the State Department of Mental Health have placed scores of children. These kids need love and nurturing, but all the mental health system can offer them is drugs and despair.



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

The hospital describes its program as designed for kids ages seven to 17. At present, I believe the youngest child is 11, although younger ones are expected to arrive soon. Bed space is available for 120 children; about 75 are there now. This number will increase as more children are expected to be shipped down from Napa State Hospital in the next few months. The Department of Mental Health plans to concentrate all the children in the state hospital system at Metropolitan.

The only outdoor space the children at Metro have is tiny patios with barbed wire fences. The hospital has interpreted state law to require that children not be given grounds passes, because this would put them in contact with adult patients. So the kids are locked down most of the time. Over the last few months, under some pressure, the hospital has had the kids taken for escorted walks, at least those who have reached certain "levels." These walks, like most of what is done there, are called "therapeutic." As you can imagine, there is much anger and pent-up energy.

The regular advocate had heard that a 14-year-old girl, L., had experienced a life-threatening situation in restraints. ("Restraints" means that the child is tied spread-eagled to a bed with leather straps and left there for hours.) We went to one of the two girls' units to investigate.

L. told us she had been put in five-point restraints (tied down at the wrists, ankles, and waist) after getting into a fight with another girl. When she continued to struggle and tried to sit up, staff came in and tied a sixth strap as tightly against her chest as they could, and left her there. L. has asthma, which was very obvious. She was wheezing as she spoke with us. Soon after having the chest strap tied down, she started choking and gasping for breath.

Staff were nowhere in sight. Some of the other girls ran for help, but staff took

See **Mistreated Children** *page 14*

TOY STORE BLUES

by Claire J. Baker

We read of hunger in Bangladesh,
Rwanda, Appalachia where children
seldom play with hot wheels, Barbie dolls,
erector sets, Barney, Lionel trains
with summer and winter stations.

I think of city waifs huddled against
a parent, another child or a dog
in corners of alleys; in winter snow
over sidewalk steam vents — no toys
to distract them into fantasy land.

Massive Homeless Deportation in Eureka

"My mom has asthma, emphysema, and her kidneys are failing. When all this started happening, I felt like I was a prisoner, that I was more of a number than a person. It didn't feel like America, that I was trapped in some other country."



***A homeless resident* of South Spit Jetty, where 300 homeless people face eviction.**

by Robert Norse

Protest marches, legal injunctions, prayer meetings, and plans for resistance marked the final weeks of preparation as residents and supporters steeled themselves for a threatened County-engineered police sweep of hundreds of homeless people camped on the South Spit Jetty south of Eureka.

On September 2, Humboldt County Health Officer Ann Lindsay ordered the road to South Spit Jetty gated and guarded and set an eviction deadline of October 2 for 300-plus homeless people encamped there. She also ordered all property not removed by that date confiscated.

Lindsay's pretext for this expulsion of hundreds of people from their only home was her declaration of a "public health emergency." Though no one was sick when she issued her order in September, Lindsay found a *causus belli* in eight confirmed cases in April and May of what she labeled Shigella dysentery. (Later Lindsay ballooned that figure to 20.)

Citing unsafe health conditions because of lack of sanitation and washing water, Lindsay declared an immediate emergency — even though these same conditions had been standard for years, ostentatiously ignored by Humboldt County officials in spite of pleas by religious and health workers. Humboldt County and the City of Eureka, nestled near the northwestern corner of the state, have 1000 to 1500 homeless people.

Doctor Wendy Ring, the regular medical provider at South Spit, rejected Lindsay's "public health emergency" in a sworn four-page declaration to Superior Court Judge Buffington on September 25. Why, if there were really such an epidemic, asked Ring, did the County refuse to provide funds to fill a water tank for handwashing in May? Why did County Health officials express no alarm at eight cases of Shigella dysentery in Eureka in February?

Nancy Dervin, a Christian minister with Love In Action, who built a 24-by-32-foot church out on South Spit Jetty and served the community there for three years, swore in a declaration to the Superior Court on September 25 that she wrote a grant in 1996 to get water, garbage, and toilets for the Jetty, but Humboldt County blocked it. "I was going to try again this year," she continued, "but the Health Department advised me that they would once again block it. (These services) could have been provided for 2 1/2 years ($1700 a month) with the $55,000 the County has committed to remove people from what little bit of security they now have." The same Humboldt Area Foundation that refused to fund a grant for toilets in 1995 is paying for social workers this year to dress up the homeless deportation.

Dervin states that Lindsay's press release claiming that St. Joseph's, Catholic Charities, and Salvation Army were given funding to help soften the Jetty eviction was refuted by direct calls to those agencies. Eureka Police Chief Milsapp, she adds, told her: "I won't let

See **Deportation in Eureka** *page 15*

the splinter effect

by Randy Fingland

kaleidoscopic
media diffusion
keeps the focus
of energy dissipated
so the fires
can burn on
in the hungry
bellies
of poor children

another century
about to lapse
without extending
the guarantee
of the right
to be alive
to everyone
on the planet

The Death of a Child is the Worst

According to his mother, Forrest's last words were: "I just want to feel good. I just want to be happy."



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

by Becky Johnson

The death of a child is the worst. The death of a little, precious, bright, energetic, cute-beyond-belief, five-year-old boy is as unfathomable as it is horrifying. How could anyone recover from such a great loss? I know I couldn't. This should not be. This cannot be.

Saturday, as I fretted over my many pressing, "important" worries, the phone rang. Moments later, my daughter called out, "Mom, it's John Hernandez on the phone." John and his partner Leslie Scales had participated in the City Hall Sleepers Protest in Santa Cruz last year. Vehicularly housed with their pre-school son, Forrest, John and Leslie were involved in an amazing number of issues putting their bodies on the line.

In addition to vigiling against the Santa Cruz Sleeping Ban, this homeless family organized a successful (and controversial) dogging of then-Mayor Mike Rotkin at a Feng Shui event with signs, chants, and homeless protesters. John has been a regular on Free Radio Santa Cruz (96.3 FM), a medical marijuana activist, and a video journalist on the front lines of the Headwaters actions to save the old-growth forest.

The death of a child is an outrage.

I answered the phone, "Hi John, what can I do for you?" I expected to hear any of a number of interesting things, from reports on police abuse, to Headwaters court actions, Food Not Bombs news, or video stuff for Community TV. But not this…

John and Leslie had a baby boy a few months ago. They hadn't planned on having a second child. John has children from a previous relationship. And the family was living in a van. Hardly ideal circumstances for bringing a child into the world. But the baby came anyway, despite their resolve. And it was a good thing as it turned out. As mommies and daddies everywhere will, John and Leslie loved the new baby. And Forrest was thrilled to have a new baby brother.

And with the love of their committed relationship, the children they had between them, the pared-down lifestyle choice they'd made, and the continuing level of activism they were able to maintain, life was good. They went north to Willits, California, where they rented a small cabin. One of their favorite things to do was go down to a special place they knew in Muir Mill Creek, where Forrest loved to play in the water.

Homeless people don't have a lot of things. They don't have a house, or furniture. The love they have for their children is unpolluted by the glitter of materialism. The loss of a child cuts deep.

The death of a child is the worst.

John's voice shattered my day: "Forrest is dead." He was crying so hard, it was difficult to hear him.

"What!" I almost shouted at him. How dare he shock me with such an obscene statement out of the blue like that. "Forrest is dead. My son. My son Forrest is dead. He died in my arms. I gave him mouth to mouth resuscitation but he was dead."

As I was able to find my voice again, shock and disbelief swimming around me like a putrefying witches' brew, the details came out.

John and Leslie had been going to Willits, where John had court dates. He had been arrested in the Headwaters Forest while he was videotaping the protest of the logging of the old-growth forest.

They were on a family outing to their favorite spot in the creek. It had rained the night before, and the water was a little frothy. Forrest drank some of the creek water. John and Leslie saw him do it. They shouted at him to stop, that the water there was polluted. There was raw sewage leaking into the creek, but no warning signs had been posted. He was only five years old. He laughed at them, and played in the water. He was such a playful child.

On August 21, Forrest became very ill. They thought it was the flu. According to Leslie, his last words were: "I just want to feel good. I just want to be happy." Leslie said he turned green. It was early morning. They rushed him to the hospital in Willits. He died 10 or 15 minutes later as John held him. He was such a sweet, precious little guy, a joy to his parents, and a playmate to his friends.

Homeless people don't have a lot of things. They don't have a house, or furniture, or a VCR. The love they have for their children is unpolluted by the glitter of materialism. The loss of a child cuts deep.

The Investigation Into Forrest's Death

On the coffee table in the waiting room of the hospital where Forrest had just been declared dead, John saw a copy of a newspaper with a picture of some dead fish. The article caught

See **Death of a Child** *page 15*

The Dissident Press of the Poor

Will the street newspaper movement uphold its integrity and independence, or is everything up for sale? To put it another way, should the homeless press be serving the poor — or the rich?

Editorial by Terry Messman

A lively brand of iconoclastic, alternative journalism has emerged in dozens of major cities in America, Europe and Canada. The homeless press has given a voice to the voiceless, and defended a persecuted minority at the very moment when dissenting voices and poor people are largely shut out of the major media.

In a fascinating twist, a group of completely independent, grass-roots newspapers has arisen to challenge the world-view of so-called objective journalism in an era of increasing corporate control of the mass media.

Homeless newspapers operate on a shoestring budget and thus are not beholden to the conservative pressures of right-wing publishers or corporate advertisers. Remember the old maxim about how freedom of the press only belongs to those who own one? Well, a coast-to-coast network of dissident homeless advocates have somehow managed to get their hands on their own presses.

Although the long American traditions of muckraking and advocacy journalism have been neglected by the mainstream press, a group of outspoken editors and writers has materialized from the most unlikely fringes of society to report on the victims of corporate America's economic depredations. This ragtag, grass-roots press gives voice to those who have been cast out of mainstream society and ignored by the mainstream press — the unhoused, the disabled, mothers and children subjected to welfare cuts, street people stigmatized as having mental-health problems, immigrants facing deportation, low-income tenants facing evictions.

Too often, when members of the establishment press report at all on poor people's issues, they either line up solidly on the side of downtown business interests and their anti-homeless legislation, or they safely maintain their vaunted neutrality. (True, Dante wrote that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in a moral crisis, but he isn't a good role model for "objective journalists.")

It is more vital than ever for the homeless press to maintain a fierce independence so that it is able to fearlessly report, for example, on how downtown business interests lie behind nearly every police crackdown against homeless people.

In many cities, that is exactly the kind of bold, advocacy reporting being conducted by homeless newspapers. But the homeless press, in order to uphold its independence and integrity, must be vigilant against succumbing to the siren song of corporate advertising and bottom-line business decisions that have become the enemy of investigative reporting in the mainstream press.

On September 12-14, I attended the North American Street Newspaper conference in Seattle, and met many dedicated editors and writers working to expose the wretched conditions endured by the poor on the streets of Cleveland, Cincinnati, Portland, San Diego, Sacramento, and San Francisco. These papers do more than just report the news; they have a deep commitment to social justice and stand in journalistic solidarity with homeless people in their communities.



Sidewalk Bubblegum ©1996 Clay Butler

THE GOSPEL OF MONEY

But a pro-business strain of newspapers also was strongly represented at the conference, a group that will have to be especially careful not to unwittingly sell its soul to advertisers and the profit motive. Several speakers preached the gospel of money, money, money. We were harangued by too many lecturers that the "bottom line, no matter how distasteful it may seem, is that your paper is a business." And the bottom line of a business is to earn profits. From that principle, everything else flows.

We were told that "advertising is probably your single most important source of revenue." We were lectured to gear our stories to a certain demographic readership that would be attractive to advertisers. We were advised to offer entertaining fluff pieces, movie reviews and crossword puzzles in order to broaden readership; one workshop presenter warned us to make our papers at least 60% light, inoffensive stuff and, at most, 40% news about homeless issues.

Needless to say, this profit-obsessed analysis conveniently ignores the very reason we launched homeless newspapers in the first place — because the mainstream press has neglected hard-hitting reporting about poverty and social injustice. *People* Magazine and *USA Today* have long since figured out that fluff sells well, but if we are counseled to adopt their profit-seeking principles, we will have abandoned the entirely different mission of the dissident homeless press.

A representative from the *Big Issue* paper in London said that there is "so much money, money, money available from advertising. It's money for nothing."

My question was: doesn't everything come at a price? Don't you have to give up — or sell — bits and pieces of your editorial integrity to appease advertisers, and convert hard-hitting editorial content into inoffensive entertainment news?

THE GOSPEL OF MOBIL OIL

Another workshop presenter advised us to covet newspaper budgets in the "six figures" and the "seven figures," and suggested we make contacts with Mobil Oil, which might provide jobs and funding for the homeless press and its vendors.

That was a devastating moment — I didn't expect to hear an unrepentant exhortation to seek funding and jobs from Mobil Oil at a progressive newspaper conference. At that point, I knew I would have to withdraw from the conference. Following the speaker who advocated a partnership with Mobil Oil, I blurted out a different set of values before leaving:

"Every time *Street Spirit* has investigated who's behind a ban on sleeping by homeless people, or who's behind an anti-panhandling law, it's always the Chamber of Commerce; it's always the downtown business associations. So what I would say as a caution to us as we're about to found this newspaper association, is that we resolve not to be like the mainstream media that sells out to their advertisers...

"The reason they do that is to make money. You know, our paper provides a job for 100 vendors. It's critical we make money for them. But you can also sell out your soul and your conscience to make money. You can forget to be fearless. You can forget to bite the hand that feeds you.

"As a journalist, I know how many newspaper editorial boards kowtow to their advertisers and lose their social conscience, because otherwise they'll lose advertising revenue. Paul Boden's paper, *Street Sheet,* for almost 10 years now, has refused all advertising. And that's why he's still got a fearless newspaper going. I hope we do, too. And I think we've got to talk about these things in this conference — the way business concerns and bottom-line focus on money and dealing with corporations can really gut the conscience and rip the heart out of a dissident newspaper movement."

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Street Spirit

Justice News & Homeless Blues

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the last tv dinner

by Randy Fingland

they say it gives a cleaner wash but it really doesn't
they say it's necessary for a better life but it's not
they say nicotine isn't addictive but it is
they say radioactivity is safe in trace amounts
but it never is
they say they can't afford to clean up toxic dumps
although causing these areas was easily affordable
they say they know what's best or worst
they say with one breath it might be healthier for us
and with another breath maybe not
they say more is always better but it's not,
like the universe everything needs to expand
but it doesn't
everything's better bigger, especially brand names
like the economy needs to grow, profits need to show,
but they don't
they say doctors recommend it
but when asked in their offices they won't
they say better not shout better not cry
they say there's plenty of old-growth forest left
but there's not
we know there's no over-the-counter medicine
that cures the common cold
although it's touted everyday
they say everybody needs one when not everybody does
they say we're at peace but continue to make weapons
in our own defense
they will say anything so everything they say
means nothing
they say it's better for us, or not
but it's not, or it is
and so we've learned to believe them
not

Where the Spirit Meets the Street

Perhaps the richest aspect of the classes is the interface of housed and homeless, of people in very different economic and social worlds coming together in silence to share the world of the spirit.

by Kevin Griffin



A meditation class **held by the Chaplaincy to the Homeless. "We are all equal in the silence of meditation."**

There are seven of us tonight. We form a rough circle in the cozy, book-lined study of the First Congregational Church in Berkeley, some of us seated on pillows on the floor, others on chairs or couches. Even with the noise of traffic outside the windows, the room has a feeling of stillness, of refuge from the frenetic energy of Telegraph Avenue and the campus area.

I begin by asking the group to close their eyes. Then I tell them to find a posture which will allow them to be both "alert and relaxed," and in which they can stay relatively still for the next 20 minutes or so. Then I begin the guided meditation

First I take them through their bodies, suggesting that they pay attention to the sensations in each spot, letting the breath carry away any tension, and noticing any "heaviness, lightness, tingling, pulsing, heat, coolness" — the characteristics of the four classic "elements": earth, air, fire, and water. This part of the meditation has a relaxing and calming effect, as well as sharpening the awareness, helping the mind to move away from repetitive thought and into a more present attention.

After we've scanned the body, I ask the meditators to bring their attention onto the breath as it enters and leaves the body. I ask them to notice very closely the sensations at the tip of the nose, without trying to control the breath in any way. After some time working with the breath, I give them more instructions on how to work with sound, with thoughts, with physical sensations. When the time is up I ring the small Japanese bell I have in front of me and the session ends.

DROP-IN *VIPASSANA* MEDITATION

I am teaching *vipassana,* or insight meditation, at the Berkeley Ecumenical Chaplaincy to the Homeless (newly renamed as simply the Chaplaincy to the Homeless). The group is made up of two Chaplaincy volunteers, a longtime meditator from the local Buddhist community, three men who have come in off the street, and myself. It's Monday night, and this is the Chaplaincy's drop-in meditation class.

Now I go around the room and ask how each person's meditation experience was. One of the volunteers, Tom, just started meditating when he joined the Chaplaincy a few months ago. He sits on a sofa cushion on the floor, and his questions and comments show a real interest in developing his meditation. He says he's been having the sensation that he's tipping over as he meditates, but when he opens his eyes, he's still upright. We talk a little about how he can work with this experience.

One of the group of drop-ins has apparently spent the meditation period sleeping, his head back, slumped on the couch. He says, however, that he enjoyed the sitting, that the sound of my voice was very relaxing. I know that the opportunity to lie back and relax in a warm, dry place with no physical threat may be the best part of the class for him, and I'm glad we could provide that.

Another of the drop-ins, a Frenchman named John, is a regular. He has a broad-ranging interest in all things spiritual, and we often get into extensive exchanges on esoteric metaphysical questions. Tonight he wants to know if I think that consciousness resides in the body or outside the body. He says he believes that his consciousness has been moving out of his body.

I'm hesitant to try to answer such a question — of course I don't know — but I share an experience I once had and what my teacher told me about it. I don't want to lose the thrust of our talk — developing awareness in the present, not experiencing special states — so I try to guide the discussion back.

Finally, my friend Mary, who is a part of the Buddhist meditation group which I study with in Berkeley, says that she noticed while watching her breath tonight that her mind tended to wander on her exhalation. This type of very close attention to the processes of the mind shows a highly developed meditation practice.

In the quiet of meditation, stereotypes tend to fall away. One visitor whose hooded sweatshirt and sunglasses gave him a sinister look, turned out to formerly have been a monk with a Chinese Buddhist group.

Vipassana is perhaps the original form of Buddhist meditation. Coming out of the *Theravadin* tradition of Southern Asia, it is based on the oldest known teachings of the Buddha which have been maintained, more or less intact, for 2,500 years in Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. It uses a very systematic method for steadying the mind in the experience of the present moment, allowing us to get some distance from guilt and worries (the bugaboos of past and future); criticism and self-judgment (the demons of hatred); obsessive thought and mindless acquisitiveness (the destructive energies which drive us); and find the wisdom which naturally arises in a clear, quiet mind.

This traditional method has been adapted to the needs of students outside of Asia, stripped of many of the cultural and religious trappings so that people from many traditions — Christian, Jewish, even atheist — have been able to benefit from this very practical form of mind training. It has even been brought into medical use in the pain-control and stress-reduction work of Jon Cabat-Zinn and others, who base their methods on *vipassana.*

And now it is being offered to the homeless and transitional people the Chaplaincy serves. When I heard about the Chaplaincy's work, I was inspired. It's clear that the homeless population needs food and clothing, but the recognition of their spiritual needs resonated with my own experience.

My time on the streets wasn't that tough — a few months in the winter of 1982-83 sleeping in a friend's Volkswagen bus in Venice Beach. But what I remember most is the feeling of desolation, of spiritual emptiness. The material circumstances were trying, but the spiritual bankruptcy almost killed me.

So when Sally Hindman, the Chaplaincy's director, came and talked to the meditation group I attend at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, I jumped at the chance to lead a meditation class for the Chaplaincy. I found Sally's energy tremendously inspiring; her willingness to engage the homeless community on their own terms opened a door for me and let me look at my own fears and prejudices in a new way. She's not a pushover, but her bottom line is always love and compassion — and service. Using her as a model for working with the people who came to the class, I began to teach, alternating Monday nights with a member of the Berkeley Zen Center.

In the beginning we tried some different formats, looking for a way to combine more of a rap session with the meditation. But over time, the simpler structure we use now developed: a period of meditation followed by questions and answers. There's tea and coffee and cookies, and things start casually around 7:30 p.m. with people standing around having a snack and talking. The intimacy afforded by the small group encourages personal interaction. In most large meditation groups, individuals find it difficult to get attention for their particular difficulties, but most nights at the Chaplaincy everyone gets to talk.

Of course, many people coming off Telegraph Avenue have lots of ideas and experiences with meditation and other spiritual disciplines. Some nights I spend most of my time trying to *un-teach* people. *Vipassana* is a very simple practice, and I try to steer people away from grandiose ideas of mysticism and enlightenment, or using meditation to develop special powers or channeling energy in exotic ways.

We are simply trying to learn to live in the present moment. This may be the greatest power of all. So much of our lives are spent in dreaming or remembering, in wanting to acquire something or wanting to get rid of it, in figuring out who is right or who is wrong. What is it like to just *be*? In this *being* we discover a world far richer, far greater than that which we imagine.

However, perhaps the richest aspect of the classes is the interface of housed and homeless, of people in very different economic and social worlds coming together in silence to share the world of the spirit. And this is one of the few places where that meeting can be done without fear or resentment. So often these two groups only meet on the street, one asking the other for money. In that interaction, the one asking may feel that the other is a privileged and selfish materialist, while the ones being asked may think they are being harassed by a lazy, perhaps dangerous drug addict.

Even in the more humane situations of shelters or food lines, there remains a relationship of helper and petitioner. While those who serve the homeless do vital and generous work, the divide is never really breached, the roles stay clearly defined.

THE STEREOTYPES FALL AWAY

In the quiet of the Chaplaincy meditation room, these stereotypes tend to fall away. What we find out about each other sometimes surprises us and, I hope, breaks down yet again our preconceptions about each other. One visitor whose hooded sweatshirt and sunglasses gave him a sinister look, turned out to formerly have been a monk with a Chinese Buddhist group. Another man, a schizophrenic, was able to make discoveries about the voices he hears simply by looking at them as an object of meditation. Some of the group have been surprised to learn that I, a financially stable technical writer, had experienced a period of homelessness.

The inner work we pursue does not distinguish designer jeans from tie-dyed T-shirts. We are all equal in the silence of meditation. With our eyes closed, we all face the same challenge, looking at the mind. With a few simple tools, however, this becomes an act of joy and mystery.

I am neither missionary nor healer. If someone wants the benefits of meditation *they* have to do the work. I pass on some methods which have been freely offered to me, methods which can be used in *any* situation, whether on the street or in the office. Their value is found in their application.

The Buddha said that the most valuable things in life were noble friends and noble conversation. On Monday nights at the Chaplaincy, I find both.

Meditation class is held on Monday nights, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. at First Congregational Church, 2345 Channing Way, Berkeley. For more information, call the Chaplaincy to the Homeless at (510) 548-0551.



***Margo Norman,* a tenant activist at Harriet Tubman Terrace.** Lydia Gans photo

Homeless In Our Twilight Years?

by Margo Norman for "Save Section 8 Committee"

Speaking of homeless... we, too, might be amongst the homeless soon — along with millions of other seniors, disabled, and all types of low-income persons.

Now, is this a big joke or isn't it? Here, in our twilight years, at a time when we felt we could mellow out and live the rest of our lives in leisure — if we spent our pennies right — along comes "the big, bad wolf" last year, knocking at our door saying: "We'll give you one year at a time to live where you are. Next year, you just might have to go.

"But we'll see to it that you get vouchers to find all types of other places; maybe stay where you are, or rent townhouses; or maybe, even, rent houses."

Who are they kidding? Who's going to have this much housing for this many more people when they don't have housing for the homeless now?

Who is going to subsidize the rent? Who is trying to get rid of Section 8? What about this tax rebate for capital gains that is designed to help the rich and hurt the poor? Wouldn't that include getting rid of Section 8? And, if that succeeds, doesn't that mean HUD WILL GO?

There are many questions to be asked, among them: "Who is the 'Big Bad Wolf?' Is it the Republicans in Congress? Is it our 'Faithful To Himself Only' Gov. Pete Wilson? Is it our Supposed-To-Be-Friends in Washington? Just who is this 'Big Bad Wolf?'"

Well, whoever he is, we're going to kill him. And we're going to kill him where it hurts — with our collective vote. They don't know the strength of Seniors. And they don't know our consciousness where the vote is concerned. We will turn out in all kinds of weather, or vote absentee, while many others will pass on by the voting polls not even realizing what they are.

We, the Seniors, will be a strong ally to those who help us; but we will be deadly to those who don't. We lived in those days when many had to fight for the vote. We know how precious it is, and we will **EXERCISE** it.

If you don't believe it, **TRY US!**

In Berkeley, Senior Tenants Organize to

Save Section 8

by Helen Lima

My name is Helen Lima; I am 80 years old, not in very good health, and I live, with Section 8 assistance, at Strawberry Creek Lodge, a senior residence in West Berkeley. In September, 1996, we were told that our Section 8 certificates would be on a year-by-year basis from then on. Later we were told that our housing assistance was secure until September, 1998.

Of course, we interpreted that news as a warning that Section 8 was under attack, becoming less dependable, and might be on the way to being abolished altogether. It made all of us very nervous, and we began to look for a way to get some security for the future in our rent situation.

We knew that the "balance the budget" gang in Congress was busy killing socially useful programs to achieve their goal because they didn't seem capable of cutting the huge military budget or foreign aid, or reducing big breaks in taxes for their wealthy corporate friends. We figured not only Section 8, but HUD itself was not far down their list for the gas chamber.

Federal aid to low-income renters is not a brand-new idea. In 1937, when the U.S. Housing Authority became part of the Department of the Interior, a National Housing Act was passed that not only included slum clearance and money to build public housing, but also included rent subsidies for low-income renters.

HUD came into existence in the 1960s when Lyndon Johnson was president. In 1974, "Section 8" became the short-hand name for a federal housing program under which people with incomes below the official poverty line were expected to pay one-third of their incomes in rent, and, if their landlords would accept a Section 8 agreement, the federal government would pay the rest of the rent money.

Attacks on Section 8 and cutbacks in the number of Section 8 certificates started in the Ronald Reagan presidency. As of 1997, 1.6 million families still received project-based Section 8 assistance.

We, as tenants in Berkeley, decided that the "Budget-balancers" needed to hear from us. So we got up a petition and got in touch with tenants in five other Berkeley senior residences. We circulated the petition, got 227 co-signers, and sent it in to 10 public officials. Since then, 294 more names on petitions have reached us from Berkeley, Oakland, Hayward, Newark and Livermore. Once word got around that there *was* something that could be done about it, a sort of grass-roots campaign took off.

Our petition calls on the government to:

1. Continue Section 8 assistance to seniors and others.

2. Issue contracts longer than one year.

3. Assist qualified property owners with their debts so they can expand the number of units available through Section 8.

4. Appropriate money for the HUD budget for building new housing for low-income seniors and others.

We got started too late to influence the current budget, but we are aiming for next year's budget discussions. By that time we hope to have reached many senior residences and enlisted the tenants in a campaign for the demands listed above. So we have a one-year campaign on our hands. Part of our work, of course, is to urge HUD to ask for enough money to cover all its programs.

Meantime, we are doing outreach to many organizations and asking for their endorsement and help. We are the grass roots part of what should become a strong and broad campaign. Filled petitions have been sent to us from many communities where we thought we had no contacts. News of the petition quickly traveled through senior centers and activities, just by sharing our worries with other seniors.

Housing is a huge national problem that just doesn't make it into the news. A few years ago there was a flurry of stories about homeless people, but that got bogged down in: Whose fault is it that you are homeless? Your's? Society's? Mine? Meantime, the number of homeless people increases steadily, and **NO HOUSING** is being built for poor people. **SOMEBODY** needs to talk about it.

If you want to circulate a petition, just write to: SAVE SECTION 8, Box 315, Strawberry Creek Lodge, 1320 Addison St., Berkeley CA 94702. We are still getting organized, but we welcome you to the ground floor of whatever we can build together.

San Francisco Tenant's Convention Mobilizes to Fight Landlord Abuses

"The city of San Francisco belongs to the residents, and we are serving Willie Brown with an owner move-in eviction."

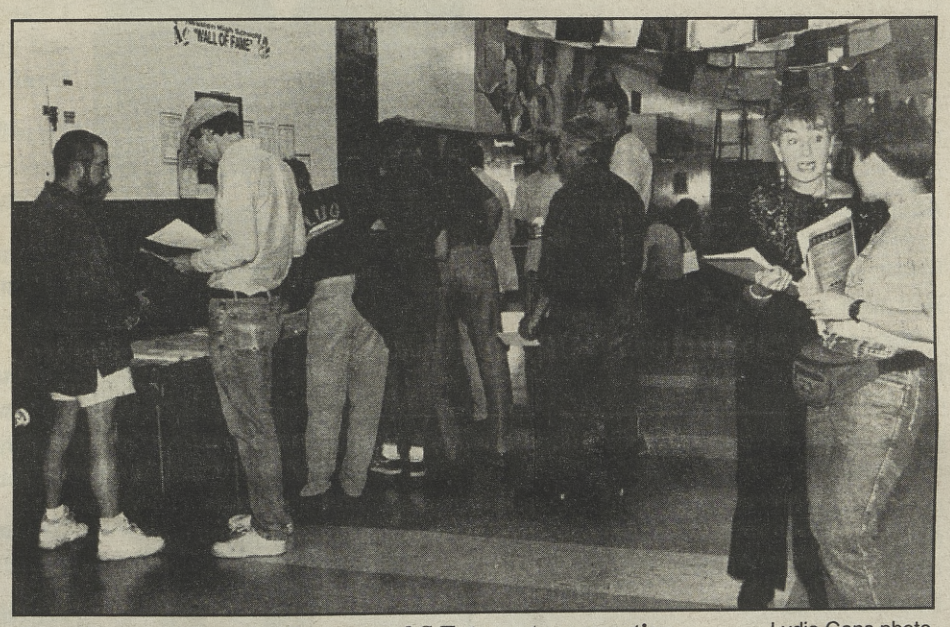
— Ted Gullicksen, S.F. Tenants Union

by Christopher Merrill

Clad with red ribbons and bandannas in honor of Mother Teresa, tenant's rights advocates and community leaders urged San Francisco tenants at the first annual Tenant's Convention to unify and strengthen their numbers. Nearly 300 tenants gathered on Saturday, September 13, in the Cornelius M. Murphy auditorium of Mission High School to devise a tenant's platform to defend their rights in the wake of a housing crisis that has left many residents feeling helpless against wealthy landlords and apathetic city officials.

Community activist Malik Rahim stressed the importance of tenant solidarity, saying: "We need to show politicians that we can affect a political consequence... if they isolate us we will all lose."

Although rents have stabilized in recent months after two years of rapid increase, the Bay Area remains one of the toughest places in the country to find an apartment. The *San Francisco Examiner* reported in June that apartment values in San Francisco alone had jumped 38 percent since 1993, causing gentrification alarm bells to sound in many neighborhoods across the city. In addition, the San Francisco Tenants Union reports that evictions have mirrored the rent increase trend, more than doubling during the same period and still increasing.



***Organizers gather* at the first annual S.F. tenants convention.** Lydia Gans photo

"We need to look at housing as a right," said Ted Gullicksen, director of the S.F. Tenants Union, "not a market issue... Housing has become a means for profit — not housing."

After neighborhood delegates delineated the concerns of their respective communities, an open forum was held for those in attendance to voice their concerns. The primary issues concerning residents of public, private, and government-subsidized housing seemed to be landlord abuse of eviction laws, safety and fire code violations, unsanitary living conditions, poor maintenance, and a general lack of affordable housing for low and fixed-income tenants.

Several guest speakers addressed the crowd and reiterated the need for tenants to be more proactive in defense of their rights. Although S.F. Supervisors Sue Bierman and Tom Ammiano were in attendance to lend moral support, the crowd was unified in their belief that City Hall has ignored them, pointing to last year's tabling of legislation that would have stiffened the requirements for landlords to evict tenants under owner move-in provisions.

Norman Solomon, author and nationally syndicated columnist on media and politics, warned tenants of relying on commonly espoused claims that the media is liberal. "The primary readers, listeners, and viewers are owners (not renters)," he said. Solomon also urged tenants to believe that government officials largely cater to the same audience as the media. He said, "They won't pay attention until all tenants raise hell." Solomon continued, "If all the landlords and all the tenants voted, tenants would carry the day."

Although the crowd dissipated somewhat after the lunch break, those who remained were determined to cull more

See **Tenants Mobilize** *page 12*

Ban the Use of Pepper Spray by Berkeley Police

An Open Letter from the Religious Coalition with the Homeless

To Members of the Berkeley City Council:

The Religious Coalition with the Homeless is an interfaith coalition of local churches and religious organizations standing in solidarity with poor and homeless people. We believe it is our responsibility as people of faith to make our voices heard with and for our homeless sisters and brothers. **At this time we wish to support a ban on the use of pepper spray by the Berkeley Police Department.**

As members of the religious community, we are very concerned about the potential dangers of pepper spray and police use of this weapon in our city. The main argument for using pepper spray is that it can replace the baton, that it is a less violent means of subduing threatening behavior, and that it is effective. Despite manufacturer's claims that pepper spray is a "non-lethal" weapon, during the last three and a half years 40 people in California have died after being sprayed with pepper spray. While no official toxicology studies have been done to determine the long-term effects of pepper spray on individuals, at least one U.S. Army study has concluded that it is carcinogenic, neurotoxic, and can produce birth defects.

Studies done by the EPA and Duke University concur that it causes injuries to people with "hidden disabilities," like asthma. We are especially concerned about the effects pepper spray may have on individuals with invisible, pre-existing respiratory or heart conditions, children with under-developed respiratory systems, and individuals under the influence of amphetamines or depressants. Many of the 40 individuals who have died after being exposed to pepper spray have manifested one or more of these invisible, pre-existing conditions.

Homeless and low-income individuals are particularly vulnerable to substance abuse and other health problems, and are more likely to have potentially confrontational contacts with police. This puts them in a high risk category of having severe and possibly fatal reactions to pepper spray.

While pepper spray initially was touted as 100% effective, it has not proven so. It is not effective in subduing people who are intoxicated, or who have mental disabilities. This means pepper spray is ineffective with a population for whom it is most often needed. Recent studies suggest pepper spray is effective about 83% of the time, about as effective as mace. Why not, then, return to using mace which at least does not cause deaths?

Since pepper spray has not been demonstrated to be non-lethal, and because no official studies have been performed ensuring its safety, we ask the Berkeley City Council to recommend the Berkeley Police immediately end its use of pepper spray.

Thank you for your consideration of these views.

Sincerely, the Religious Coalition with the Homeless



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

Rev. Elvin Baker, Jr., Pastor
Ollie Grove Baptist Church

Bill Balderston, Chair
Social Action Committee, Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists

James Baraz, Teacher
Spirit Rock Meditation Center

Rev. J. Randolph Bare, Director
Westminster House, Presbyterian Campus Ministries, University of California, Berkeley

Berkeley Friends Meeting
Peace and Social Order Committee

Prof. David Biale, Director
Center for Jewish Studies
Graduate Theological Union

Rev. Dr. Gary Brower, Episcopal Chaplain
University of California-Berkeley

Rev. Dr. Vernon S. Burroughs, Pastor
St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church

John Castelfranco, Coordinator
East Bay Sanctuary Covenant

Rev. Dan Chambers, Minister
First Congregational Church of Berkeley

Rev. Gordon W. Choyce, Pastor
Missionary Church of God in Christ

Rev. Dr. George Cummings, Faculty
American Baptist Seminary of the West
Pastor, *Imani Community Church*

Rev. Pat de Jong, Pastor
First Congregational Church of Berkeley

Rev. Dr. Joseph Driskill, Faculty
Pacific School of Religion
Asst. Dean, *Disciples Seminary Foundation*

Ecumenical Peace Institute/CALC

Sister Bernie Galvin, cdp, Director
Religious Witness with Homeless People

Rev. Diana Green, Assoc. Pastor
University Christian Church

Rev. Sang En Han, Pastor
Berkeley Korean United Methodist Church

Pastor Michael B. Hester
New Light Christian Center

Sally Hindman, Executive Director
Chaplaincy to the Homeless

Robert Lassalle-Klein, Faculty
Jesuit School of Theology/Graduate Theological Union

Joanna Macy, Faculty
Starr King School for the Ministry

Prof. Dan Matt, Faculty
Center for Jewish Studies
Graduate Theological Union

Rev. George Matanic, Pastor
St. Mary Magdelene Parish

Terry Messman, Editor *Street Spirit*
American Friends Service Committee PMRO

Bishop Roy C. Nichols, Interim Pastor
Church by the Side of the Road

Wes Nisker
Buddhist Meditation Teacher

Northern California Ecumenical Council
Peace with Justice Commission

Rev. Marvis V. Peoples, Ed. D., Pastor
Liberty Hill Missionary Baptist Church

Clare Ronzani, Faculty
Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley

Father Tom Ryan, Priest
St. Ambrose Church

Mark Schroeder, ofm
Justice and Peace Co-Coordinator
Franciscan Friars-Santa Barbara Province

Maylie Scott, Priest
Berkeley Zen Center

Alan Senauke, Priest,
Berkeley Zen Center
Director, *Buddhist Peace Fellowship*

Rev. Kim A. Smith, Pastor
Trinity United Methodist Church of Berkeley

Ron Stief, Executive Director
Center for Ethics and Economic Policy

Dr. M. T. Thompson, Pastor
Berkeley Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church

Mrs. Frances H. Townes, Founder
Berkeley Ecumenical Chaplaincy to the Homeless; First Congregational Church

Louann Troust
Campus Ministry, University Lutheran Chapel

Rev. Kathleen van Sickle, Pastor
Good Shepherd Episcopal Church

Shura Wallin
Dorothy Day House Catholic Worker

Mel Weitzman, Abbot
Berkeley Zen Center

Rev. Lee Williamson, President
Methodist Federation for Social Action
California-Nevada Chapter

Rev. D. Mark Wilson, Pastor
McGee Avenue Baptist Church

Public Hearing on Pepper Spray
October 21, 1997, Tuesday at 7 p.m.
Berkeley Community Theater
1930 Allston Way between Milvia and MLK

Call City Councilmember Linda Maio (a key swing vote) at (510) 644-6359. Ask her to vote to ban pepper spray.



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

Shelter

by Sandy Valadon

I looked for shelter
And found none
I slept on the street corner
I was cold

I searched for food
And found scraps
Bread that was dirty and old

I was filthy and sick
In need of care
But none was there for me

I was made derelict
Except for roaming the streets
There was no place for me

I chattered to myself as I roamed around
With no direction in mind
Through the vicious streets of the city
Half out of my mind

They tossed me out of the bus stop
Where I meant to spend the day

The children and old ladies laughed at me
And told me to get out of the way

There was a time I had a good name
But I can't remember when

I had children, a home, and a good job
But it's too painful to think of them

I'll probably die this broken creature
Nobody knowing who I am or used to be

They say this could have happened to anyone
Dear God, why did it happen to me?

Message of a Sit-in: *'We Won't Stand For This Bylaw!'*

Canadian Activists Defy the Sitting Ban and Defend the Rights of Homeless Youth



***Protest* in downtown Victoria, British Columbia, shows solidarity with homeless youth.** Cynthia L'Hirondelle photo

In Canada, as in the United States, government fixation with the deficit has resulted in the wholesale gutting of social services and a campaign to blame the poor for the fact that there are not enough jobs to go around.

by Jacquie Ackerly

Demonstrators in Victoria, British Columbia, took to the streets on July 21, August 2, and again on September 14 to protest a new bylaw which targets homeless youth by making it illegal to sit, kneel, squat or lie down on downtown sidewalks between the hours of 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. This poor-bashing bylaw, which we are convinced manages to violate both Charter rights and human rights, has been put in place to give the police another "tool" (their word) to deal with the problem of homeless youth sitting on the sidewalk with their backs against a building begging for spare change.

The Victoria City Council has bowed to downtown business interests who want to wring as much gain as possible from the tourists and who have blatantly ignored dozens of attempts by community groups to create solutions to the problems of poverty in downtown Victoria. Only 12 beds are available for youth in the single youth shelter in the city, and there are no public washrooms and no benches (except at bus stops). The food bank provides food to families only, and several thousand university students chase after the same minimum wage jobs.

The We Won't Stand For This Bylaw Committee plus 500 friends and supporters held a Take Back The Sidewalks Party on September 14. Party organizers set out with the express purpose of flouting not only the bylaw banning "sitting, squatting, kneeling or lying" on downtown sidewalks, but also a number of other restrictive bylaws targeting homeless people which have been passed in recent years.

In defiance of these sweeping restrictions, party-goers skateboarded, handed out leaflets (that might become litter), provided services (face-painting) on the sidewalk, played music without buskers' licenses, defaced public property (by chalk-drawing on the sidewalk), and sandwich-board-sign wearers lingered near the intersection and engaged people in conversation. Food was provided by Food Not Bombs, individuals and the Committee.

As they have since the bylaw was passed, Victoria City Police kept an eye on the celebration but did not ticket anyone. For anything. The police and city officials just ignore the protesters and go on their merry ways passing law after law that make people's lives meaner and harder. So we just keep on keeping on. In other parts of Victoria, people work on mounting a legal challenge to the bylaw.



***Activists sit-in* to defy Victoria's anti-sitting bylaw.** Cynthia L'Hirondelle photo

On July 21, 1997, a spirited protest of the new bylaw brought together a diverse crowd of 175 youth, local social justice groups and concerned citizens who squatted, sat, knelt and lay on the sidewalk in resistance to the anti-homeless provisions. Carrying a banner stating, "WE WON'T STAND FOR THIS," the protesters moved onto the street, blocked traffic for a half hour, then marched to City Hall where they pleaded with police officers: "Give me a ticket!" Once it became clear that no tickets would be issued, the protest moved on to the main downtown intersection in Victoria, at Douglas and Yates.

Later that evening, three tents were pitched on the corner in an attempt to use irony to carry the message. Although protesters did their best to get ticketed under the Street Camping bylaw, police did not cooperate. Early on the morning of July 22, police moved in and confiscated tents, sleeping bags and blankets, but did so under a different bylaw that makes it an offense to erect a structure on public property.

The Coalition Against the Bylaw, made up of over 20 community groups, held daily noon hour protests the following week. On August 2, they held a second protest which started at City Hall, and then conducted a sit-in down the length of tourist-filled Government St. to the Provincial Legislature buildings.

The City of Victoria passed this bylaw to continue its unrelenting attack on poor and homeless youth. Known as the "Anti-Street Camping Bylaw," it is being used to intimidate youth sitting on the sidewalks. Youth are threatened with a $35 ticket and confiscation of any belongings (backpacks, blankets, etc.), which is often enough to get them to move on. If they resist, they are dealt with under other laws such as causing a disturbance, owning an unlicensed dog, or having a backpack on the sidewalk (construed as "erecting a structure on public property").

Social justice activists believe that the anti-sitting bylaw is not only unconstitutional, but that its application is discriminatory. Defenders of the bylaw, Mayor Bob Cross, Victoria City Police, and a spokesman from the Downtown Victoria Association (a business group), have argued that there is nothing to worry about because ordinary people — weary mothers and toddlers, tired tourists, etc. — will be free to sit and rest if they need to. They claim the bylaw is a "needed tool" to deal with the "1%" of street youth whose sitting is a "problem." A team of law professors, law students and community activists are preparing for a legal challenge.

"This bylaw is legislated poor-bashing and we will be out here leafleting every day until it is repealed," vows Rose Henry of the Together Against Poverty Society.

Mike Walker of the Victoria Street Community Association echoes Henry's sentiments. "Victoria is a real city, with real people living in it and some of those people are poor. They are still members of this community and should not be swept aside in order to present a sanitized city for the enjoyment of tourists and the lining of commercial pockets. There are lots of good ideas in our community that would address the problems of homelessness, but we have had no success in getting this city council to consult with us. They have chosen instead to violate the Charter rights of every citizen and the human rights of a small and powerless minority — homeless youth."

As in the United States, both federal and provincial government fixation with the deficit has resulted in the wholesale gutting of social services and a campaign to blame the poor for the fact that there are not enough jobs to go around.

Unemployment is officially at 10%, and for youth it is closer to 20%. In reality, the numbers are likely 50% higher than the government admits. While we have lost *much ground in Canada in our fight to* protect social programs, we have been able to resist most attempts to "Americanize" our health care system. But it is under attack, as is funding for education.

The We Won't Stand For This Bylaw Committee is planning a larger and longer street and sidewalk demonstration for Victoria's 3rd Annual Observation of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on October 17.

Jacquie Ackerly is president of Together Against Poverty Society in Victoria, which provides one-on-one advocacy services for individuals having trouble with welfare, unemployment insurance, or with their landlords.

STREET MUSICIAN

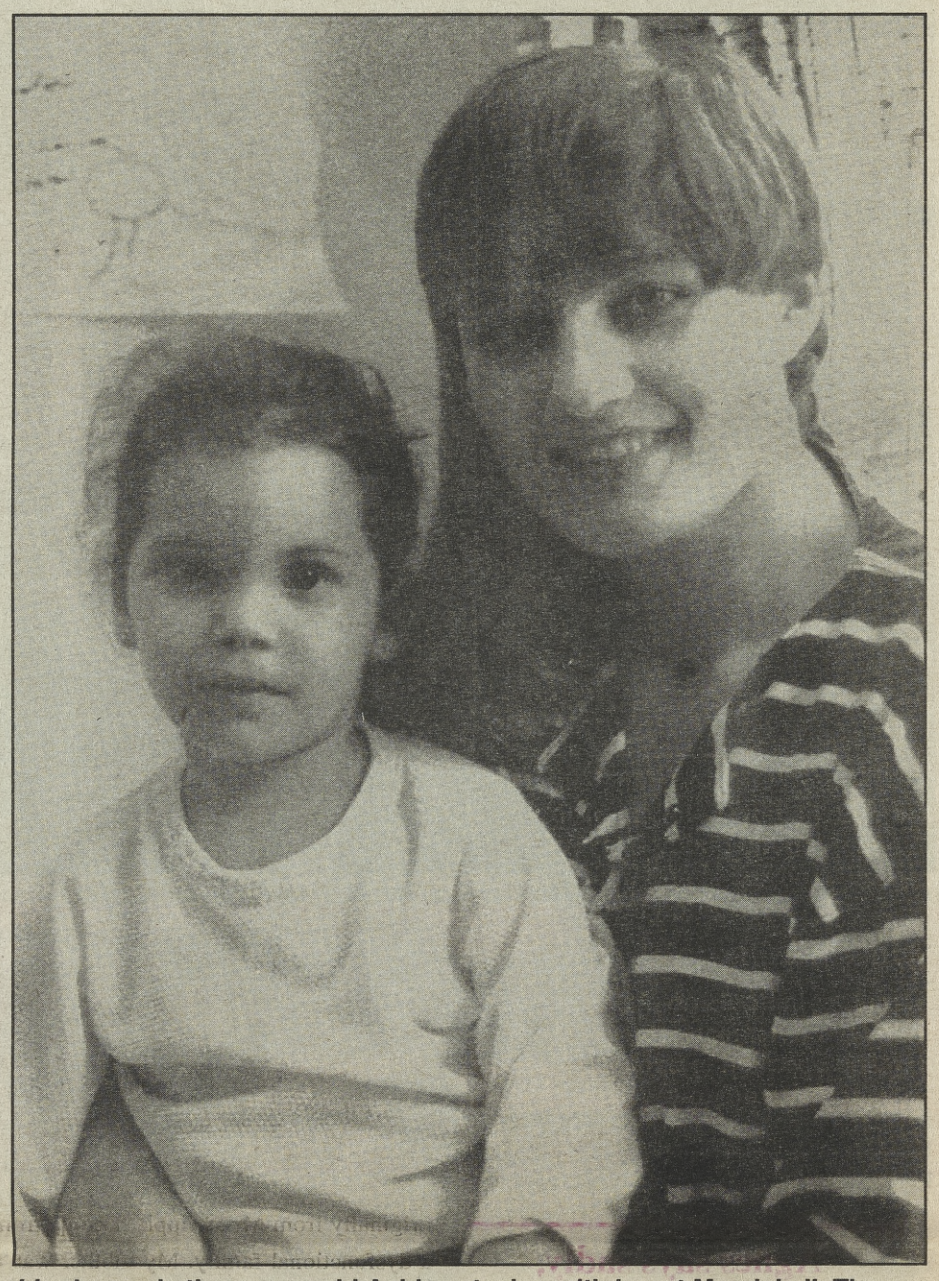
by Julia Vinograd

Crossed legs, bare arms,
leaning against a boarded-up building
like he owned it,
his drunken voice is full of
pebbles and warts,
a horny cement mixer humping a toad.
The words get ground up in gears,
swallowed in slimy juices,
slurped, sucked, drooled.
His guitar was last tuned by a dinosaur
and when the dinosaurs come back
it may be tuned again.
And maybe not.
But when he drops his wet mustache
to that mouth harp
the notes are clean as churchbells
ringing under the sea.
And as cold.
He shudders a little as he plays,
takes another gulp of beer,
then starts singing again
with marvelous disregard of melody
to keep his courage up.
Under the sea
soft fleshy oysters cradle his name.
They can wait.

BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION



Constance, **shown here with her nine-month-old son Dashawn, is a resident in the Solid Foundation's recovery program. She is determined to become a drug counselor and help other people in trouble.**



Lisa **has only three-year-old Ashley staying with her at Mandela II. Three of her other children are staying with her husband and three are with her sister-in-law. Seven little kids are a lot to cope with but Lisa is anxious to go home and have the whole family together.**

Some women can't handle the rigors and drop out. But those who succeed, who give birth to drug-free babies, who stay clean and sober and take control of their own lives, truly are women to be admired.

Photos and story by Lydia Gans

Mandela House was founded 10 years ago this December. Named after Winnie Mandela, it means a House of Struggle, says Minnie Thomas, founder and executive director. She took in six women who were pregnant and drug addicted, and worked with them to get clean and sober and deliver healthy babies. Thomas kept them for a year or longer, giving them a chance to learn living and parenting skills and to gain self esteem and confidence to create a healthy life for themselves and their children.

Minnie called it the Solid Foundation, and in spite of the ever present anxieties over funding and some nasty NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) battles, the program has grown into a highly respected beacon in the struggle for a healthier community. The original Mandela House has moved several times but still accommodates six women who are pregnant or with infants. Keller House, founded in April, 1990, is named for Helen Keller and can house another eight women. Mandela II, a larger 20-bed facility taken over in May, 1992, is for addicted mothers and their children up to three years old.

All three are long-term residency programs with stays of a year or longer. In addition, the foundation provides outpatient services for women in a day treatment center, and education, advocacy and information to the community at large.

For the women who are accepted into the residences, the program is intense and demanding. When a pregnant, drug-addicted woman moves into one of the Solid Foundation's houses, she withdraws completely from the outside world for at least 90 days. No outside contacts, not even phone calls. Staff and fellow residents are with her constantly, helping her to begin to understand herself and deal with the problems that led to her addiction. They help her keep clean and sober so she can deliver a non-toxic baby.

When she is ready to give birth, someone accompanies her to the hospital and remains with her during her entire stay.

"IT'S A FAMILY HERE"

Minnie describes what she expects a woman to achieve during those first 90 days: "Managing her time, learning to control her temper, be able to feel bad and still operate in the family. It's a family here." In order to develop a treatment program, the woman's problems and needs have to be identified so that by the end of the 90 days her real program can begin. It is six months before she can go anywhere outside by herself, but even then no overnight or weekend stays are allowed.

After six months it is time to start going to school, to work, or to get training and learn to take care of the business of making a living. Meantime, the staff has been working with the woman on a reunification plan with her other children so that now they can come stay with her on weekends. The children cannot live with her until she has completed the program.

Graduation usually comes after a year to 18 months. At that point the ideal is for the family to move into transitional housing where there is some supervision and counselors are readily available. The Solid Foundation has such a good reputation that its graduates have no problem being accepted into the transitional housing programs that are run by various agencies in Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

However, any kind of decent housing is expensive, and less and less subsidized housing is available. To meet the need, Minnie is looking into acquiring and running transitional housing complexes that can be shared so it would be affordable for women coming out of the program.

It's very easy to get started on drugs — crack cocaine seems to be everywhere. But it's terribly hard to get off. That's why the program has to be so rigid. Keeping clean and sober while pregnant is hard, but at least there is the incentive of having a healthy baby. Staying off after delivery, when all the pressures and responsibilities of living really hit, is agonizing. There is so much to learn.

"I WILL NEVER RETURN TO DOING DRUGS, NEVER!"

Lisa is 24 years old and has seven children, including two sets of twins. Even with a supportive husband, this is a lot to manage, especially for someone who never had the chance to learn parenting and home-managing skills. She dropped out of school at 14, and was 16 when her first child was born. She already had several children when she first tried drugs.

A friend had some, but Lisa makes it clear that her friend did not push her; she asked for drugs, and found she liked it.

"My advice to anybody that's using: Please get it together because it's destroying all races, all people and especially it's destroying families. And kids don't deserve that."

It's as simple as that. Hardly more than a child herself, Lisa saw drugs as a way to deal with the alternating boredom and stresses in her life. Eventually, charges of child neglect and having her children taken away by Child Protective Services forced her into the Solid Foundation program. She's not sorry, she knew she had to change, but it is a struggle.

Lisa said, "Recovery is not easy. Not a day goes by that I don't say I want to go home, I don't want to deal with this. I'm talking about problems that I've had in my life and I don't like the way I feel. I want to go back home. Not to use, just to go where I feel comfortable. But I know that I have to stay here and do what I have to."

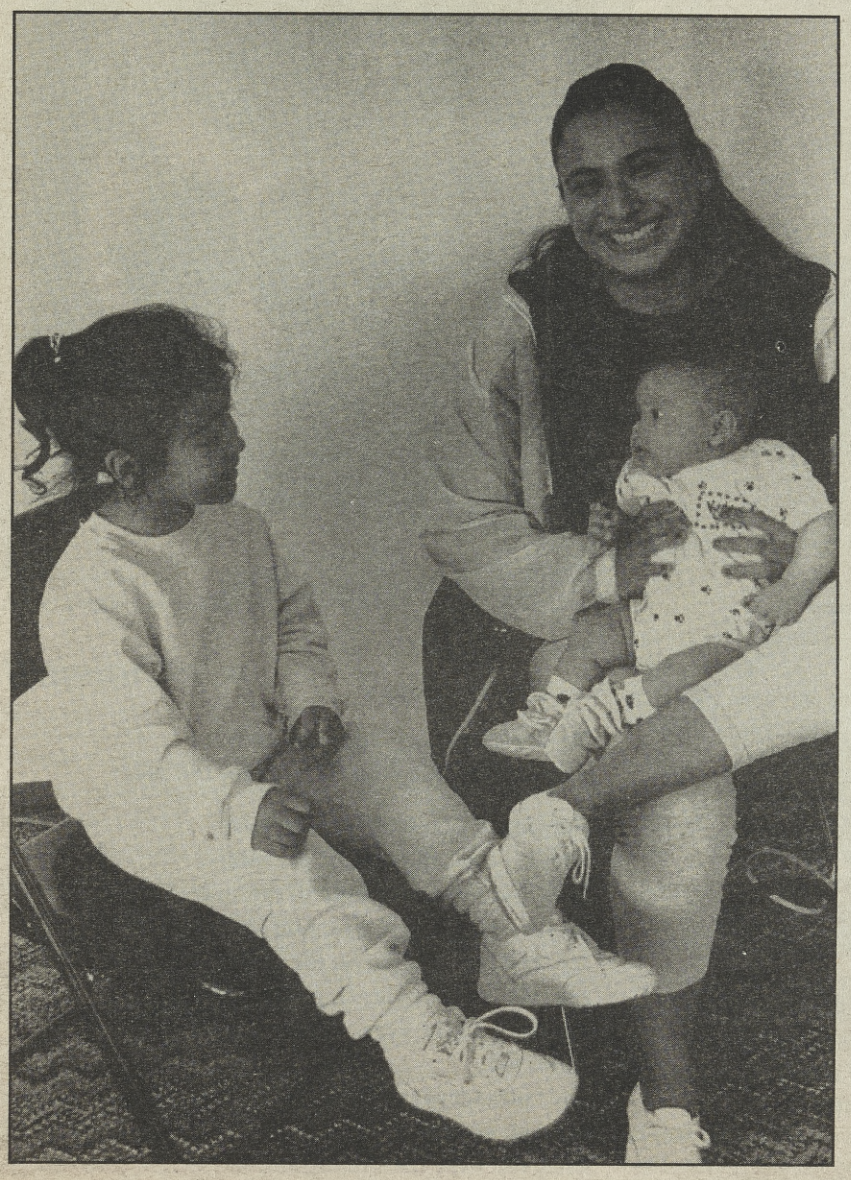
Lisa is determined. She wants to build a relationship with her husband and the children, and she would like to get a job. She wants to change herself and her life from the way it was before. And most of the time she is confident that she'll do it, because she is determined. "I don't care how hard it gets, I will never return to doing drugs, never!"

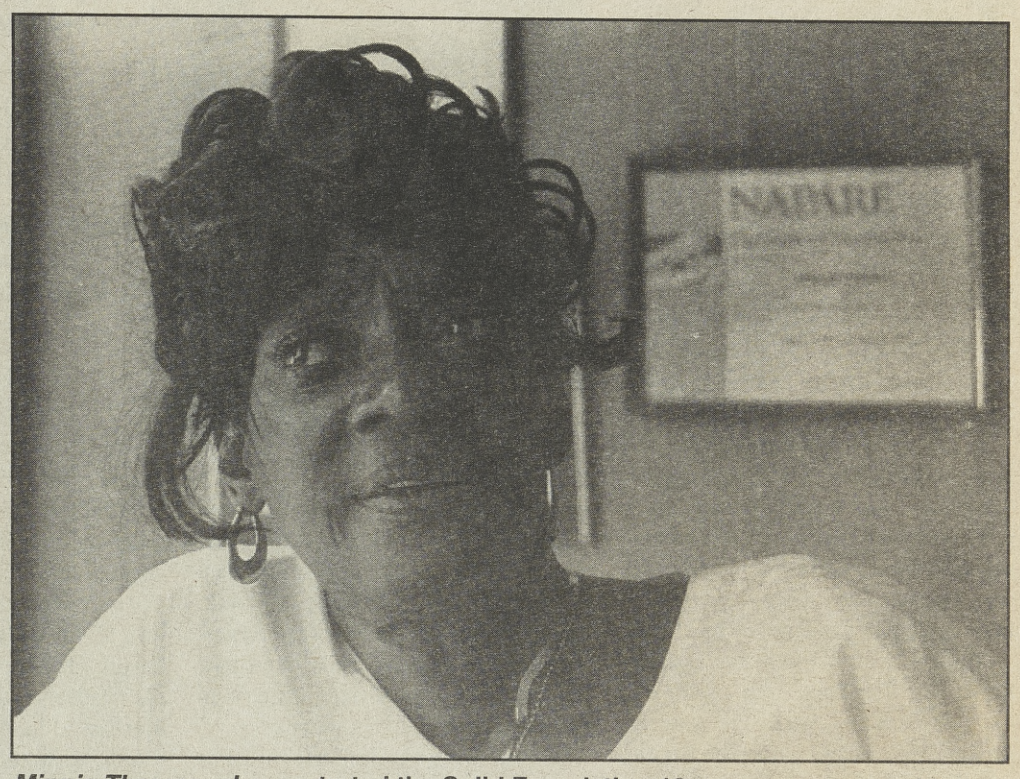
Changing, self-understanding, learning don't come easily. That's why the Solid Foundation has a large, carefully screened staff. One or more house managers are on duty around the clock in each of the three residences. After all, a woman who is pregnant might have trouble sleeping, or one with a new baby is as likely to need help at night as during the day. And if she goes into labor during the wee hours, a van and staff person to drive and accompany her have to be available. Skilled counselors spend many hours working with groups and individual residents to give them insight into their problems and motivations and help them gain that all-important sense of self esteem.

Minnie Thomas articulates some goals of the counseling work: "... to think correctly, to program the body to do what the mind wants it to do. You've got to be able to smile when you feel like slapping somebody, because that somebody might be your supervisor. You've got to be aware of your enemies, fear and violence, and still be able to maintain. That's what we teach here. You are the captain of your own ship. You have the oars or the wheel

Continued on page nine

...ON FOR DRUG-FREE BABIES





Minnie Thomas, above, started the Solid Foundation 10 years ago as a residence for drug-addicted women. She now runs three houses for pregnant women with infants and young children, and conducts outpatient programs and community education. She is currently developing transitional housing for the graduates of her recovery programs.

Photos by Lydia Gans

Alice, left, is on cloud nine. Sarah and Monique were just returned to her by Child Protective Services after a two-and-a-half week separation. They were taken away because of her drug use, but now that she in the Solid Foundation's residential program, the children will stay with her.

Agnes says sadly, "Many of them have never had Easter. Many cannot remember a good Christmas."

or whatever you use to steer it. The only time you're going to get off course is when you stop looking at the map. And the map has to be in your head."

Judith Lithrin is a volunteer who works with the women at Keller House to help them understand and articulate their feelings. She also teaches them all sorts of useful skills such as analyzing the labels on food products, and standing or moving with an air of confidence, not looking either too insecure or too aggressive.

Another principle of the program is to give the women all kinds of experience. Minnie Thomas says, "We take everything that happens and turn it into a learning experience." Often the women's lives have been very limited and nobody ever taught them some of the things many of us take for granted. Agnes Lyons, house manager at Mandela, recalls one Friday evening before Easter when the women were going to dye eggs. They would have a party and hide the eggs the next day.

One of the residents decided to go into the kitchen and start dyeing the eggs by herself. She made an awful mess! It turned out she had never dyed eggs before. Agnes says sadly, "Many of them have never had Easter. Many cannot remember a good Christmas."

Constance has had lots of experiences. She sold drugs for 15 years but only very recently started smoking crack herself. Now she says she is glad that she used it because, "I know, by using it, I'll never sell it again. I'll never touch it again, never go back."

Hearing her history, it is not surprising that she got involved with drugs. She's originally from Mississippi. "I come from a dysfunctional family. My mother was a heroin addict" (and died of it). "She abused me. My father molested me. Of the molestation, I have an 11-year-old daughter from him." Constance married a man who was also a drug dealer. She loved him and had four children with him, but he lied, cheated and abused her.

Before coming into the Solid Foundation, she says, "I was lost, no self esteem, no understanding and no direction... Now I feel good about myself. My self esteem is not up there but I'm stable. It's still going to take years of work."

In three more months she will graduate from the program. She plans to be a drug counselor. She knows she can be a good counselor because she has not only the "book smarts" but the actual experience behind her. "I know what I have to do to stay clean and sober. My advice to anybody that's using: Please get it together because it's destroying all races, all people and especially it's destroying families. And kids don't deserve that."

There are different theories on the nature and treatment of drug addiction. Meanwhile drugs, especially crack cocaine, are becoming more and more easily available in our communities. We see its devastating effects and appreciate the different people and programs attempting to fight this scourge.

The Solid Foundation recognizes that for a substance abuser, the problem is not just drugs, it's dealing with life. Therefore, the Solid Foundation makes great demands on the women in its program while at the same time giving them powerful love and support and a sense of worth. Some women can't handle the rigors and drop out. But those who succeed, who give birth to drug-free babies, who stay clean and sober, who graduate from the program and take control of their own lives, truly are women to be admired. They are among today's heroines.

Agnes

by Shirley Grant

From the Heart of Haiti
She couldn't return
Scars on her face and arms
Scars on her soul
She heard voices
Communicated with Spirits
Sang to them, Conjured them
They put her on Meds
She talked, sang, Conjured
over the Meds.
She was really beauty
original beauty
And she would smile at me
And that smile was like
a beam of light
in a dead materialistic World.

Tran

by Shirley Grant

She stood 4 feet 8 inches tall
But the love and joy in her
stood as tall as a northern
California Redwood
She was 62 and had one daughter
left behind in Vietnam
Two sons, and her man
had been killed in the War
Her people always had to fight
the French, the Americans
Her Westernized son put her out
And she after seeing so much
was living with me
at the Mill Street Shelter
We had a language barrier
But no barrier of the heart

PUPPIES ON THE STREET

by Julia Vinograd

A big brown dog with 6 new puppies,
tired teats drooping.
She sways like a broken backed horse
and she wants to sleep,
she pushes the puppies away
as they come nuzzling: 2 light brown,
2 dark brown, 1 black,
and 1 black with white paws.
None of them will stay in the cardboard box
where their owner put them
on top of each other.
The box is too small
and the bottom's about to give way.
The puppies' teeth are soft,
they bite each other's faces
and wag their feet off balance.
They don't really look like dogs yet,
they look like furry muffins with paws.
Passersby question their owner
but they don't look at her.
She has a faded bedroll and dogfood
and I think she lives on the street.
She looks as tired
as if she'd just had puppies herself.
She must keep them till they're weaned.
Then she breaks off to chase the black one
which stumbles off the curb
into the path of the car.
She catches it out of harm's way
and croons.
Who will catch her?

in the custody of night

by Eileen Corder

one floor underground
and I'm not the only woman here
who searches while she quietly eats
for a place in one of the other worlds

in the custody of night — who rests
in her custody and in her squinted up eyes
what child turns suddenly into a mirror
what window seat, what boat, what breeze

A Warrior Poet

Dennis Omowale Cutten of Oakland

by Wanda Sabir



Dennis Omowale Cutten

I remember meeting Dennis Omowale Cutten in Old Oakland, at Khafre's Cultural Center, on 8th and Washington. On Sunday afternoon there'd be jazz and poetry. Musicians and poets would get together and jam.

Dennis used to talk about Oakland "back in the day," when music and liquor filled the streets and speakeasies. When beautiful voices sang the blues on 7th Street at Slim Jenkin's Nightclub, Esther's Orbit Room, and the Continental Club.

It was on 8th and Franklin that the first draft of Dennis' masterpiece, "The Sun," was written. Dennis wrote it as he gazed out of his Chinatown neighborhood apartment window. He was the first black person that I ever knew to live in Oakland's Chinatown.

Dennis used his pen like a paintbrush. In "The Sun," the reader can see the residents, smell the activity, imagine life on the street below the artist's window.

Dennis used his pen like a trumpet — clear, loud, and well-tuned. Dennis was such a great writer, I thought he had written John Coltrane's marvelous, "A Love Supreme," when he excerpted it in an original poem by the same title. Dennis just smiled when I told him that several years later.

He was a good friend.

I remember when Dennis began taking classes at the Berkeley Adult School, he'd come to my downtown Oakland office and use my computer sometimes. I was really proud and happy for Dennis when he started getting published in the *Street Spirit,* then enrolled in college, working as a tutor, then started hosting cultural programs for the College of Alameda, as he pursued a degree in African American Studies. The man was a scholar.

I remember when his mother became sick and Dennis went to San Francisco, then stayed until she was back on her feet.

He was a good son.

Dennis did a lot to promote the arts in Oakland. He was the President of the International Black Writers and Artists, Local 34. He sponsored many poetry events and workshops through this organization. He also lent his support in the Oakland Public Library system to various programs and funding efforts that promoted literary arts.

Even when his head began to give him unbearable pain, Dennis tried to continue on with his many social and educational activities.

His loving partner, Toni Anderson, had to literally drag Dennis to the hospital last year in July to see about the headaches that had been plaguing him for so long. The doctors found a tumor, operated, and removed about 90 percent of the unwanted guest.

After the surgery and radiation therapy, his writer's voice was silenced, and the headaches only partially went away. With hardly any short-term memory, it was hard for Dennis to read or go to the movies or theatre. Even holding a simple conversation was rather pointless after awhile. Dennis couldn't remember any recent occurrences.

Then he took a turn for the worse.

See **Warrior Poet** *page 11*

POETLINE

by Dennis Omowale Cutten

This is an emergency!
I've an emergency!
Are you there?!

I'm calling all poets…
all poets…
am calling all poets…
…… can you hear me?!

Damn! I thought I'd never get an answer.
Now please listen:

We must unite.
Somehow, we've got to make good more appealing than evil.



A Soul Shines On

for Dennis Omowale Cutten

by Terry Messman

Do you hear us up there, angels?
A poet is coming home, bound for the sun.

How many times did he let us see
with his eyes, the eyes of the soul,
eyes that shine in tribute to the sun?
Borrowing his eyes, we could see
the unseen suffering on the street,
see invisbile heartbreak made visible —
it's there, in the eyes, when a hungry child
is not fed.
The conscience needs eyes,
blazing, visionary
eyes. His were the shining sun's.

And 30 long, deadly years past the summer of love
he proclaimed love like its last prophet,
returning forever and always to the shining
sacred message: love one another,
or the poet's eyes will burn a hole in your soul.

You've closed your eyes, Dennis Omowale.
How do we see now?
ee cummings said "Buffalo Bill's defunct,"
then asked, "How do you like your
blue-eyed boy, mr. death?"

Myself, I ask no questions of death.
I refuse to talk to thieves.
For Dennis' sake, I'd rather beat it to
death, beat it 'til it bleeds Resurrection.
What's needed is a sledgehammer —
a sledgehammer for suffering and sorrow.
Just the right sledgehammer to
break the death-grip of a poet's cancer,
to break open the domain of death
and take him back alive.
A sledgehammer to break the back of the blues!
A sledgehammer to liberate us from
the body of this death.

Wake up, angels, a poet's on the loose.
He'll set off the emergency alarms all over heaven,
He'll ring the poet-line until he wakes the dead.
There <u>better</u> be justice up there, it's an emergency!
Angels, you better start loving each other — now!
Or make no mistake, Dennis <u>will</u> set off your sirens.
You better make our poet feel at home:
TURN ON THE SUN!

And if there's any justice in heaven,
as there mostly isn't here on earth,
how about sledgehammering to bits
his pain? How about righting this wrong?
Give him all the mercy, all the shining, blazing
compassion he gave us on earth below.

Down here below,
I'm flying my eyes at half-mast these days,
and I can't see so good in this dimmed light.
But it's a different story up above.
A poet shines among the stars now.
Let the brightness begin!

THE SUN

by Dennis Omowale Cutten

The day is confused,
full of nagging anxiety.
Pale grey clouds make the atmosphere gloomy.
The denizens of the streets
carry despair on their faces;
rarely do they (righteously) smile.
There is an emptiness in their souls —
pain leaks through the vacancies.

The people suffer from lack of understanding.

Cats, dogs, pigeons, the sorry-looking rat,
move, dispiritedly, along the sidewalks,
the gutters, the alleys,
sniffing, searching for scraps of food:
what remains of a sandwich, a chicken bone,
a watermelon rind, crumbs,
lifeless french fries, the bones of barbecued ribs.
Pork or beef? It doesn't matter.

The denizens lollygag on street corners;
they stand in doorways,
lean on light poles — rest against buildings.
The children are a bit listless —
playing uninspired tag.
When they aren't playing, they frequently beg:
"Got any change?"

The whores/hookers hook with undulating asses,
dress in revealing clothes;
pace up and down the streets.
As the men try desperately
to balance hard thoughts,
cops lay in the cut
to collect the customary bribes.

The men, with little to do and nowhere to expand,
are bored and mad with themselves,
for the images are internalized, despised.
They implode: sling slicing invectives;
use weapons to hurt, to maim, to kill each other
at the slightest, dropping (real or imagined) insult.

The people feed on each other.

The sun is asleep
and can't see the confusion,
the despair, the pain,
the suffering. But the sun soon moves and changes.
The sun — this sun,
knows there is work to be done:
streets to be cured:
denizens to be healed.
Then soothed with a thrilling,
a hip understanding.

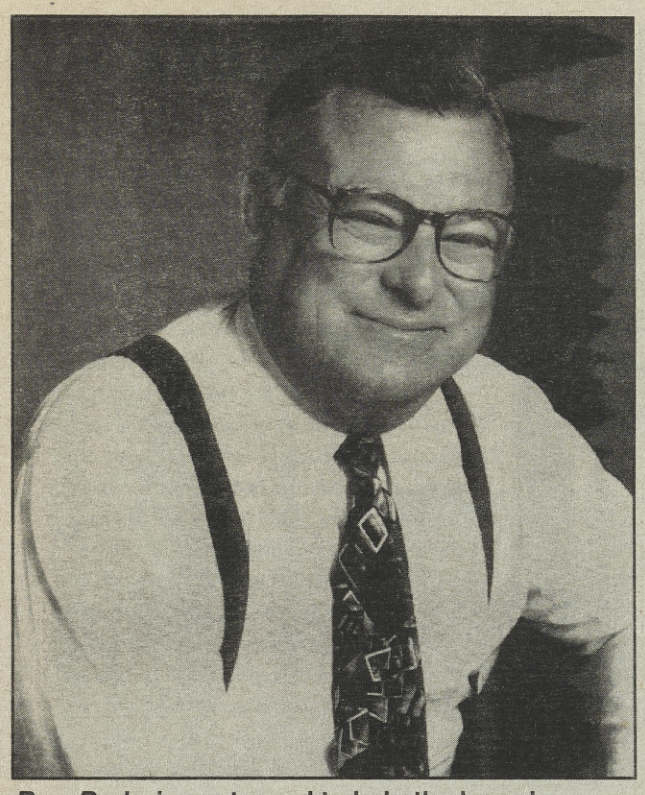
The sun turns on its stomach,
yawns, O-P-E-N-S its eyes,
stands up straight.
The hands of the sun shoot from the sky,
piercing through the clouds.
And the day catches afire.

It is a giving sun, a healing sun,
a considerate sun.
It doesn't cast stones, nor bemoan what has passed.
Magnificent. So magnanimous....
It beats with rhythmic force — cooking like jazz.

The movement is jazz.
A cultural metamorphosis —
so hot and teeming, the eyes of the streets
can't avoid the exorcism.
The sun improvises too.
Like Hawk, Bird, Trane!
Lady Day and Abbey Lincoln,
Miles, Mingus, and Monk's "Well You Needn't"
There isn't a need for the hidden agenda.
No rhetoric to trip on
to confuse the trusting aspirations.
Just scorching heat,
that timeless beat… infused
with the singular energy of love.

The sun keeps on shining and blazing.
I keep on shining and blazing.
It keeps cooking.
I keep cooking.
It keeps on beating,
and I keep on beating, cause —

I AM THE SUN.



***Rev. Drake* is sentenced to help the homeless.**

Rev. Drake Wins a Moral Victory

by Robert Norse

The homeless community of Orange County's Buena Park won a rare victory on September 19, when Rev. Wiley Drake was spared jail, fines, or probation and commended for his work by the sentencing judge.

Drake, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Buena Park, had been convicted of four misdemeanors in July for housing homeless people in his church. In response, Drake, his homeless guests, and the broader congregation all held firm, declaring they were willing to support Drake — even if it meant developing a ministry in jail, or joining him there.

Seeing this, North Orange County Municipal Judge Gregory Prickett sentenced the determined churchman to 1500 hours of community service, but then declared that community service already had been done through Drake's work in housing the homeless — the very "crime" for which Drake was dragged through the courts. Prickett also declined to put Drake on probation — a prudent move, considering Drake had vowed to continue housing the 70 homeless people now living in his church or go to jail with them if they were evicted.

The First Baptist Church itself was put on informal probation for three years. The prosecutor took this to mean that he could drag the church back to court the next day if they were still housing homeless people, since it had been convicted of "changing the zoning use of a building" and "allowing camping on church property." Church officials could face up to two years in jail and $4000 in fines if that happens.

Judge Prickett told John Bryan, who signed the probation papers for the church, to return to court on November 14 to prove the church was making "reasonable progress" towards finding a suitable new structure in which to house the homeless. However, the judge added that he himself was engaged in a food ministry and found it a shame that criminal charges had even been brought into court on the matter. Prickett faces reelection in 1998.

More than 200 people reportedly were at the sentencing along with national media. Homeless women and men from other cities also attended the hearing in support of Drake. Homeless activist Larry Milligan of San Diego had promised to join Drake at his church and replace him in supporting the homeless people there, should Drake be jailed.

Drake reports that Buena Park police have stepped up their harassment of the homeless. The result is a significant increase of homeless people coming into his church, as well as a decrease in the number of poor families in his neighborhood willing to visit Drake's church and face possible retaliation from authorities. Drake has long operated a neighborhood food distribution program serving hundreds of Latino families in the area.

Drake's church is also under the shadow of a civil injunction requiring him to move homeless people out of the enclosed, windowed, and heated patio area. That injunction is on hold, pending appeal. Drake is optimistic about his prospects.

Warrior Poet

from page ten

Almost a year after the surgery, Dennis had to go into a convalescent hospital. He had become disoriented and lost his balance easily. The hospital had told Toni that they couldn't operate anymore. Dennis was dying. He stopped eating and drinking. And all attempts at intravenous, or forced feeding, were rebuked.

When I went to visit Dennis, his eyes would light up, especially when I read him some poetry or talked about some writing activity I was involved in.

He was weak, but he'd squeeze my hand to let me know that he was listening. Sometimes I would talk to him, or I'd read to him from the Holy Qur'an, or we'd listen to Miles Davis or John Coltrane while Dennis patted his foot under the covers in the hospital bed.

Dennis died in his sleep, Wednesday, August 6, 1997. His memorial on Saturday, August 9, 1997, was well-attended. There is a scholarship fund set up in Dennis' name at the College of Alameda, and the West Oakland Branch Library wants to help produce a tape or book of Dennis' work to sell to raise money for this educational fund.

This February, the West Oakland community honored Dennis at the annual African American Celebration through Poetry, at the West Oakland Branch Library. I'm really happy we did that. We called the event, *"Warrior Poets,"* after a poem Toni wrote for the occasion.

Dennis Omowale Cutten was indeed a **"Warrior Poet,"** whose words still have the power to pierce hearts and change lives.

Media ignores anti-nuke protest

by George Kauffman

The September 97 *Street Spirit* was quite exciting, all that poetry and the Al Jones/Jackie Cabasso article on "Housing or Holocaust Weapons" vis-a-vis the UC Regents funding more atomic "research." Some of us had a direct experience with this issue when we spoke to the Regents on September 18 to protest this funding; two things emerged not quite planned for:

1. The campus cops photographed most of the speakers (and all of us who spoke in opposition to more nukes). When my turn came to speak for two minutes, I opened by stating that, "As a resident of Berkeley for the past 84 years, I thoroughly resent my photo being taken by that cop; have I broken some law?"

2. Being a public hearing, I was struck by the fact that two TV cameras were dark and silent, standing behind us like a praying mantis; I guess the public is not newsworthy. But I was not prepared for the following: the next day, the entire press of the Bay Area blew us away. The *Chronicle,* the *Examiner,* the *Oakland Tribune,* the *Daily Cal* printed not one word! Talk about being piano players in the nuclear whorehouse!

B-2 bomber: $2 billion boondoggle

One B-2 bomber will buy…

100,000 entry-level social workers at $20,000 yearly salary

78,000 teachers at $28,000

16,000 HMO doctors at $125,000

66,600 librarians at $30,000

groceries for 400,000 families per year

summer jobs for 420,000 kids

65,000 college students for four years

build 13,000 average-priced homes.

Julianne Malveaux
Sunday Examiner, Sept. 21, 1997

The Dissident Homeless Press

from page three

"You have to watch very closely when you take money from Mobil Oil, for instance, which is polluting the environment. And see if that is consistent with a human rights stand.

"What about how the business community has been behind so many sleeping bans? Does this give us any caution about just accepting *any* advertising, or should we be thinking about only accepting ads from socially responsible advertisers?"

How will the North American Street Newspaper Association maintain its journalistic independence while key members advocate partnerships with Mobil Oil? On September 19, five days after the conference, Phillip Babich reported in an *East Bay Express* article about Oakland's boycott of Shell Oil: "According to human rights reports, the Nigerian military has tortured, beaten, and executed environmental activists for speaking out against oil companies — including Mobil and Chevron — that pollute their land."

The question is: who do we betray when we sell our newspaper space — and our principles — to Mobil Oil? Should homeless activists not care about the brutality inflicted on environmental activists in Nigeria? Are we to turn a blind eye on human rights in search of advertising dollars? Is it too much to ask that the North American Street Newspaper Association establish firm, clear guidelines about what constitutes socially responsible advertisers, and what does not?

SOME THINGS AREN'T FOR SALE

At present, *Street Spirit* accepts no advertising. If we ever did, the only ethical way to do it would be to accept ads only from nonprofits doing good work in the community, socially responsible institutions and locally owned businesses. But that's if we ever do it.

Both *Street Spirit* in the East Bay and *Street Sheet* in San Francisco have never accepted advertising at all. It's much harder to make it financially because of our position. But some things shouldn't be for sale. The truth is one of them.

And we're not the only publications to conclude that advertising can co-opt and corrupt your editorial independence. *Ms.* magazine eliminated advertising in 1990, rebelling against the sexism of many ads, and rejecting the practice of printing stories about products advertised in its pages merely to keep the ad money flowing.

Ms. had the rare integrity to abolish advertising, instead of compromising with it. It lost money, but saved its soul — which is the exact opposite of what most mainstream publications have done.

Others have told corporations to "take this ad and shove it!" *Consumer Reports* remains free of advertising so it can honestly evaluate consumer goods. Venerable *Mad* magazine is ad-free in keeping with its mission of satirically deflating the hypocrisy of Madison Avenue advertisers.

Milton Glaser recently reported in *The Nation* ("Censorious Advertising," Sept. 22, 1997) that Chrysler corporation sent a letter in early 1996 to all magazines that carry its advertising, requiring that they "submit articles in advance for screening by Chrysler to determine whether they contain any editorial content that may be construed as provocative or offensive. If these articles offended Chrysler's sensibility, it would pull its advertising."

Glaser responded to Chrysler's attack on freedom of the press by withdrawing from his nomination for a Chrysler design award. Calling this attempt at prepublication censorship a "repellent development," Glaser pointed out that many corporations have adopted the same tactics by insisting on some influence over editorial content, including the common practice of making advertising dependent on a publication's running favorable articles related to the product. In fact, Chrysler has complained that it is "being persecuted" for these practices "because it is willing to acknowledge a policy that many other companies practice covertly."

Glaser denounces Chrysler's practices in words that should be emblazoned in the conscience of every newspaper editor: "It is reminiscent of the McCarthy era in the fifties where script submission to agencies and advertisers was a common practice on television. This was one of the dark moments in our recent history. Censorship of this kind that acts to curtail the exchange of unpopular ideas is unacceptable for all those who care about human freedom and a healthy democratic society."

Journalism today has forsaken its heritage of dissent and outspoken critique of the powers that be. Too many newspapers offer safe, sanitized news, and give scant attention to hard-hitting investigative reporting, let alone any sustained critical analysis of the established order.

How could this happen in a country spurred into the American Revolution with the help of the scathing political writing of pamphleteers such as Thomas Paine? America has a long, proud tradition of muckraking, troublemaking journalists — the fiery abolitionist writing of William Lloyd Garrison; the vivid exposé of the meatpacking industry by Upton Sinclair; the social-criticism-disguised-as-fiction of Sinclair Lewis; and the imaginative experiments of Hunter Thompson and the underground press of the 1960s.

The sorry state of "pack reporting" in America could be remedied if editors began to measure their writing against the impassioned calls to conscience of Henry David Thoreau, say, or George Orwell, rather than cutting all journalists off at the knees to make them fit into the Procrustean bed of *USA Today.*

A 'Modest Proposal' to Abolish Rent as We Know It

Families rent for decades but are still only days away from eviction when the landlord, who bought the home largely off the lifelong labor and wages of the tenants, decides to sell it and keep all the profit.

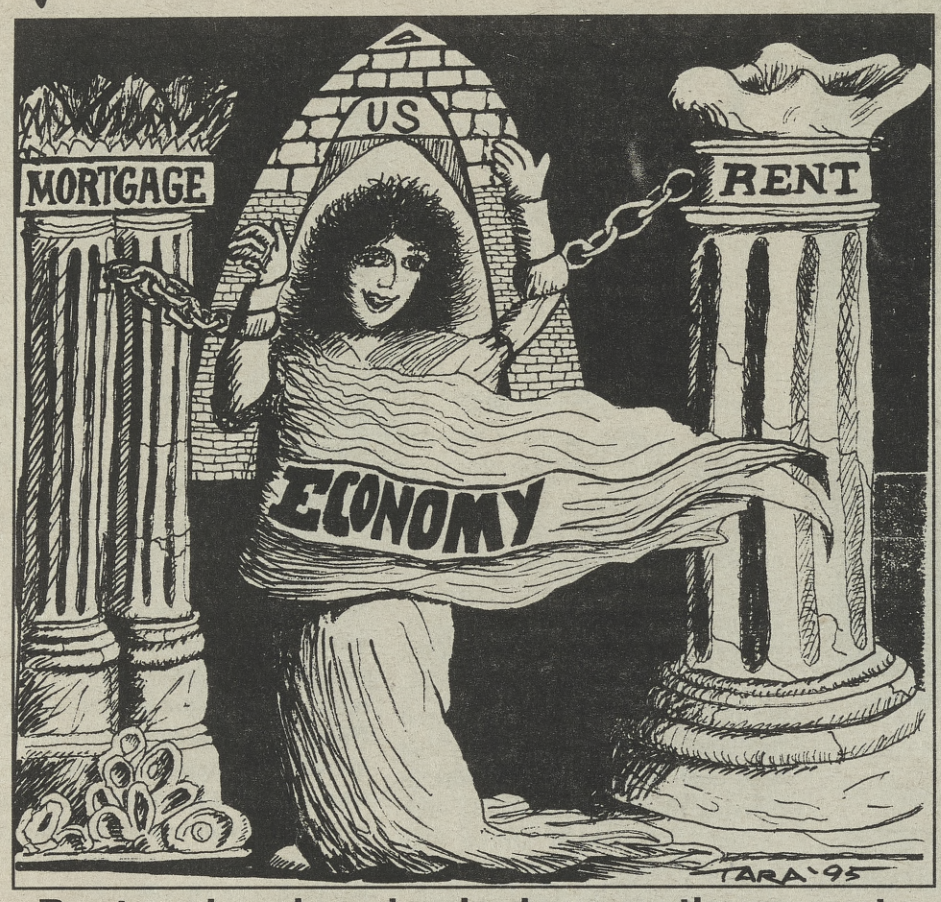
by Billy Quealy

What do you call working all your life so someone else doesn't have to (except, that is, to collect 33-80% of your income every month)? Some kind of long-term fair investment, I hope. But if it's a rental agreement, you pay simply so you won't be forced out on the street with only three to 30 days notice. You pay to help the owner purchase the home you live in and maintain with your wages, before getting kicked out.

Tenants are led to believe they have no right to any equity from the property payment we call rent. Are tenants who pay their rent, then, being "good slaves?" Thousands of homeless folks are humiliated by the rent system, which makes them property subject to rulership by a landlord who denies them any equity for their labor or investment. Too many homeless services expect that homeless people are eager to get into some rising rent trap.

One definition of rent means, literally, "to tear," and accordingly tenants are torn apart by rent in more ways than one. The public is torn from even the notion that in fact it is their occupancy, not the rent, that "maintains housing." Most people believe they pay rent to live somewhere, forgetting that if no one lived there, it would cost time and money to keep the housing from just returning to the elements.

Our native ancestors, from whom we acquired many of our democratic principles, reasoned upon a common experience when they established that it doesn't matter who *says* they keep the land, what matters is how land is kept, and for whose keepsake then does the land produce. With feudal blood still running, we evicted these native ancestors, and I won't rub it in except to say we eventually apologized in some cases and promised to stop. But we "rented" that agreement, didn't we?



Rent undermines basic democratic precepts

Still, *rent* is a *ransom* against threats of eviction by force to the street. (And once a family is on the streets, their children may be taken into custody.) It's the option most people face for housing in America. Add to the number of renters the families struggling against foreclosure, paying the mortgage. Someone figured out a mortgage (mort=death/gage=rate) that assures you will pay until you die, basically.

Many economic hardships result from this parasite of feudalism within our budding democracy — not the least of which is how it *rents* apart families. Weak minds go right off the edge, contributing to America's child and spousal abuse, racism, and gangs. Soaring rents in the nation create multiple hardships and prevent tenants from ever being able to get ahead. In April, 1995, a University of California study reported that a number one cause of poor nutrition in California was high housing costs.

Families rent for 10, 20, 30 years, but are still only three to 30 days away from eviction when the landlord, who bought the home largely off the lifelong labor and wages of the tenants, decides to sell it and keep all the profit.

Of course, this is *not* democracy, so it comes as no surprise that organizers are prepared to demonstrate just how illegal the rent system is in its present state. Rent, as a system of being bonded to an estate, gives nonrepresentative tax levy authority to the lord of the land in question.

The number of politicians who were able to pay for their election campaigns and afford public office via property speculation, taints effective, fair representation by the government in this matter. But luckily, it's not a legislative issue anyway. It is a judicial matter to call upon existing constitutional protections, such as property ownership of rent. Skip Newt and Clint, go straight to Souter.

Property taxes, considered undemocratic by many, are another failed attempt by the government to get back some of the money drained away from the national economy through housing and land speculation in order to pay for the public works we all enjoy: sewage, water, roads, *and* welfare, most of which, ironically, goes so low-income people can pay unconscionably high rents to wealthy landlords. The property tax on the wealthy is passed along as higher rents upon those collecting welfare. Go figure.

No one was given a choice or allowed to vote about paying rent. When people elect to pay *less* rent (through rent control and other measures), their efforts are often shattered by loopholes resulting in more evictions to raise rents. Rent control has been a little like asking a mugger for train fare, and being sworn at. In Massachusetts, efforts to undo rent control (financed by real-estate interests) have turned into a movement to abolish rent altogether as the feudal remains of pre-democratic society. Ditto New York.

Indisputably, free exercise of various rights are abridged by present (systemic) housing contracts. Constitutionally protected rights abridged by the present rent system include, but are not limited to, the following: right to property ownership (takings of property via rent without compensation in form of housing equity); protections against discrimination based on income; protection from unfair trade practices (nonnegotiable rental/mortgage contracts, unjust eviction clauses, monopoly, speculation, etc.); protection from nonrepresentative taxation (rent as unregulated tariff); protection from contract by coercion of force (rent as ransom against threat of eviction by force, and threat of broken families and homelessness.)

While this is certainly a valid list of complaints to argue the case for abolishing rent and renegotiating housing contracts in America, rights granted by the Constitution must still be laid claim to by the petitioning party in redress. In practice, tenant rights have been abridged by laws enacted by realty capital, in the wake of renter apathy and disorganization.

As housing consumers, renters simply have been mugged in this regard. It took 100 years to abolish slavery, and about 160 years for women to win their guaranteed right to vote. In this context, it isn't all that surprising that it has taken tenants 210 years, and counting, to throw off their yoke of rented servitude to a property class.

The rent system should be abolished because it causes massive deprivation on all levels of society. Systemic greed perpetrated by the rent system provides us with the moral imperative to free ourselves from the social and economic consequences of having one group of property owners forever live as parasites off another group of people — those without property, whose wages and labor is given up as ransom to the threat of eviction by force, and without credit for investment in our nation's housing supply.

When rents were low it was convenient to pay and not make waves. Now, however, rents have gone through the ceiling, and, at the last moment before the U.S. housing catastrophe, it's time for tenants to engage in some sort of democracy movement. One such tenant union, from Santa Cruz, created a Tenant Congress for tenant unions, housing consumers, and supportive groups and individuals to organize nationwide renegotiation of housing contracts for all Americans. Contact them by writing: Tenants Congress, PO Box 7059, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

STREET: 1995

*for Cynthia Turner**

by Jack Hirschman

A guy I know who sells watches
on Market St. for a living, he
tells me about how,
a few days ago, another guy,
fishing in a plastic
garbage can nearby
for some food to eat,
came upon the body of
an African-American woman,
not alive.

The guy I know, his name is Luca,
isn't from this country.
He's been waiting for papers
(because he married an American
woman and they've a child,
though now they're separated
and she lives in Provo, Utah,
with the kid and her grandmother)
to return to Italy.

"It's too much, there's just too much
nothing here..." he says, trying
to make himself heard above the siren
of an ambulance nearby. Around
the corner from where we're standing,
a car turns, screeching,
a young guy next to the driver yells
"Fuck you!" out the window.
At no one. Everyone. Nothing
in particular. All.

** classical musician from Oakland. her murder remains unsolved.*

S.F. Tenants Union Offers Free Training for Volunteer Counselors

During the current housing crisis, San Francisco tenants are overwhelming agencies which can help them with their rights. In order to meet this demand, the San Francisco Tenants Union will train a class of new volunteer counselors in October. The Tenants Union has scheduled a two-day training on tenant's rights for prospective volunteer counselors.

The training will take place on consecutive Saturdays, October 25 and November 1, at the Tenants Union office at 558 Capp Street, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. The classes will be taught by some of the city's leading experts on tenant's rights under state law and San Francisco rent control.

Tenants who want more information about attending this training should call **(415) 282-6622** and register with their name, address and phone number.

The Tenants Union is an all-volunteer organization providing tenant's-rights counseling services and legislative advocacy for affordable rental housing. After training, volunteer counselors take responsibility for their own counseling shifts.

INFORMATION: Ted Gullicksen (415) 282-5525

S.F. Tenants Mobilize

from page five

from the convention than a list of gripes — they wanted solutions.

Tenants counted off into several groups, irrespective of demographic and geographic boundaries, and brainstormed for solutions. When they reconvened, several proposals resonated with the crowd, including a tenant's hotline, door-to-door canvassing to increase their numbers, and a multi-lingual tenant's platform for city-wide distribution. Tenants and activists alike agreed on an unusual request for more lawyers to provide assistance in drafting legislation for the November ballot.

After a long day of emotional purging, another meeting was called to keep the tenant movement rolling. On October 4, there will be another convention to burnish the platform and discuss implementation strategies. One course of action was unanimously approved without further review. In the near future, Mayor Willie Brown will be served with an eviction notice. Said Ted Gullicksen of the S.F. Tenants Union, "The city of San Francisco belongs to the residents, and we are serving Willie Brown with an owner move-in eviction."

LIFE IN A BOARD AND CARE



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

by Joanna Freeman Bragen

Imagine this. You have been in a psychiatric hospital for a nervous breakdown. You are to be discharged soon, although you still don't feel very well. The social worker assigned to you has set you up with a board-and-care home, because you don't feel up to living independently right now.

Neither you nor your social worker has seen the place, nor does the social worker know much about it. The board-and-care operator has come to meet you and seems anxious to have you move in.

She seems nice enough, so on your discharge date she comes to pick you up to take you to your new home. You pay her $680, leaving you with only $60 from your monthly SSI check. In return for this you are offered three nutritious meals a day, laundry privileges, and most importantly, a bed.

The house looks pretty nice so far, nice living room and kitchen, and a pay phone. Then she leads you down the hall and tells you that this is your area of the house, and that you will be locked out from the rest of the house (including the pay phone).

You notice that the only way outside or to the bathroom is through the men's rooms. There is no common living space, no television, and you discover that in the bathroom (which reeks of urine), there is no toilet paper!

You knock on the door that seems to separate the "haves" from the "have nots." The board-and-care operator yells at you for disturbing her. You wonder what she thinks her job entails. She gives you a small amount of toilet paper, commenting that people will just use it up if she puts it out. You ask to use the phone, and she pronounces that it is only to be used at mealtimes. You return to your cold room to sleep.

In the morning you wake up early to the sound of her hollering about how everyone wakes her up so early. You go to have breakfast before leaving for your day treatment program. You find that she hasn't made breakfast yet, and she insists that you are wrong and your program doesn't start until later.

Frustrated, you leave to catch the bus, missing a



How Can I Help?

by Joanna Freeman Bragen

I wish I could go
to an all-knowing guru
and ask her
how can I help
those who are in pain ?

I wander
from place to place
from face to face
I hear their stories
of hopelessness and
being treated with disgrace

I wonder
if enough people knew
the truth
would this world change?

I try to spread the word
as far as I can
to anyone who will listen
and try to understand

but the stories
of falling slides
and exploding buildings
cover the front page news
and the accounts that I write
always seem to lose

I wish I could know
when will I get my chance
how can I help those
who are in pain
how do I fit
into this dance?

DOPE CONSEQUENCES — 1997

by Richard Carlos, Oakland

For dope fiends like myself, learning the consequences from our drug life can go on for a lifetime. Take my own case, for example:

I never thought I would ever give up my love of heroin. Back before 1975, I was so out of control with the drug that I had to bang the stuff at least every two hours. Nothing mattered, not how I got the money to pay for it, or who was hurt in the process The only thing that counted was the needle stab in my vein and the numbing rush that only heroin gives to the body.

I started this obsession when I was 18 years of age, and even when I was recycled again and again through the county jails and state prison, I would find a way to get a fix. By the time I was 36, I was burnt out, beat-up and hooked to the dogs. I began playing death games and betting I would beat the spinning chamber of a .38 Colt, fixing a spoon of raw heroin and periodically waking up from an overdose in the jail ward of San Francisco General Hospital.

In 1975, I was seriously trying to take my own life. Instead of death, however, I found a methadone program and lived. From that year to this year, I have been clean. Clean is not well. I am not a well guy. I will never be a well guy. I just don't use.

As methadone enabled me to become clean, it was SSI disability benefits that gave me the chance. Without my benefits, I would never have come out of the streets, never have rented my first apartment, never have cooked a meal for myself or bought a book to read. SSI gave me the time to grow.

Now the benefits have been discontinued. I am faced with a return to the streets. I have no marketable work skills. But I am not a bum and I dislike begging. If it comes down to pushing a shopping cart or pushing some dope, the consequences of a decision will be mine to bear.

THE ADDICT'S PSALM

by mister ed

When drugs are my shepherd
I shall know want.
They maketh me to lie down
in lean pastures;
they leadeth me beside troubled waters.
They destroyeth my soul.
They leadeth me in the paths of licentiousness
for their name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley
of the promise of death,
I will fear all evil,
for I am alone and without family or friends.
Their glass rod and staff of brew discomfort me.
They preparest a table before me
in the presence of mine enemies.
They anointest my soul with wanting more.
My cup cannot runneth over.
Surely sadness and grief shall follow me
all the days of my life
and I will dwell in the house of Hell forever.

People Are Still Dying

by Joanna Freeman Bragen

It is 1997 and it seems that the conditions for mental health consumers have not necessarily improved. The bottom line: people are still dying. Doesn't this mean anything?

Today, we are not kept in state hospitals (that is the big move towards "better treatment"). But where have we been sent? To "Acute Care Psychiatric Hospitals" (like East Bay Hospital, which finally closed after years of abuse). We have been sent to live in board-and-care homes — where we are robbed of almost all our money, and live in substandard, sometimes dangerous, housing situations. Both of these places seem barely regulated. And we are sent to the streets, to shelters, to jails, and prisons.

We are "treated" by community health care. We are seen once a month (or less) — for 15 minutes. We are supposed to find "community supports," if we can figure out what that means. We try to find food and clothing, jobs and education. We try to find emotional support. Some of us are lucky and do okay. But some are not coming out of this situation alive.

And I wonder: How many more people have to die? What will it take to make people wake up and care? It saddens and angers me that people are treated so badly. But what hurts more is that not many people seem to care, until someone is already dead. Then they wonder — what went wrong? Don't you know that we have been trying to tell you all along?

These "mental health consumers," these people who are dying — they are my friends, my neighbors, my hospital roommates. These people are like me. And I care about what happens to them. And I am afraid.

It has to stop. Just one more death is too many. Whatever can be done to keep conditions for mental health consumers to be livable, has to be done. Listen when we tell you what is going on. Each death pushes our community farther and farther away from a society that treats all people like they have value.

The *BELLES* at St Mary's

by mister ed

The *Belles* at St Mary's
smile when we meet.
They even pause to greet.

They don't ask,
"Were you naughty last night, did you drink?"

They say,
"I can help you,
I think."

Mistreated Children at Metro Hospital

Virtually all the children at Metropolitan are drugged, though few have diagnoses that would really justify it. Restraints are used for the slightest infraction. But the worst abuse is to spend years of your childhood locked in a total institution, with the constant message that you're worthless, you're nothing.

from page one

their time about getting there.

L. reported she was put in restraints frequently. When I looked at her chart later, it confirmed that she was tied to the bed several times a week. There was little explanation of why, and, of course, no note that her life had been endangered.

The first thing that struck me as I spoke with L. and the other kids who were witnesses was how little they would fit the stereotype of "mental patients." They were some of the most appealing kids I had ever met. I told them about my own experience, very briefly, and this seemed to make a strong impression on them.

I spoke with T., a very articulate 17-year-old who I noticed was an excellent witness. She was able to tell me very clearly what had been done to L. in a way that few people I have interviewed as an attorney can do. One of the first things T. said to me is that she expected, when she reaches her 18th birthday in a few months, that she will be sent to one of the adult units and spend the rest of her life there.

It was very hard for me not to burst into tears, because this is exactly what I myself faced at age 16 in Rockland. I looked at the despair in the face of this appealing young girl and felt more anger at the system that had done this than I've felt in many years. T. has spent a year and a half in state hospitals. I believe this is shorter than the average stay.

Shortly after I spoke with T., I saw a figure walking down the hallway, stumbling around like an 80-year-old who had had a stroke, and I wondered what an old woman was doing on the children's wards. As she came closer, I saw that it was T., so drugged that she had trouble walking properly. She is being given five kinds of psychiatric drugs. Her body is bloated and her hands shake. If she is ever allowed to leave the hospital, she will be sent out into the world with tardive dyskinesia, at age 18. (Tardive dyskinesia is a very common kind of brain damage caused by psychiatric drugs. The most obvious outward sign of it is that the victim's mouth and tongue twitch uncontrollably.)

I skimmed T's chart. Among other nonsense, it said that she is "resistant to therapy" because she sleeps much of the day. I remembered how I too had slept as much as I could at Rockland State Hospital — to block out the horror of my surroundings. But I never had to deal with the horror of having my brain burned out by psychiatric drugs.

Metro's children are drugged

As I went around the units trying to speak to as many children as possible, I noticed many kids passed out on the sofas and benches in the middle of the day. Virtually all the children at Metro are drugged, though few have diagnoses that would really justify it. Restraints are used liberally for the slightest infraction.

But what is the worst abuse, and I know because I have experienced it, is to spend years of your childhood locked in a total institution, with the constant message that you're worthless, you're nothing, that nobody cares about you, that you're important to no one. And because you are so young, and you have no other picture of the world, you have no way to resist this indoctrination in self-hatred. And then, after years of this, you're sent out into the world, if you're lucky...

Several weeks later, I returned to Metro and, at about six in the evening, attempted to read T.'s chart to get a more detailed picture of how she was being drugged. The ward psychiatrist was there, and realizing I must be checking up on her, tried to keep the chart from me, saying it was "confidential." I told her that the State Welfare and Institutions Code gave me the authority to read it but she ignored me.

Soon the charge nurse and then the supervisor of nurses appeared, demanding that I stop reading the chart and turn over my notes. Then about eight or ten large male staff appeared, standing massed in the middle of the nurses' station as if in some kind of military formation, looking as menacing as they could. It was time to leave (with my notes). I had to unlock and relock many doors to get out.

I realized after I reached the outside that I may have been in danger. If one of the goon squad summoned by the psychiatrist had lost control, there would have been a dozen "witnesses" to make up any story that was needed to cover their actions. My knees trembled and my cardiac arrhythmia kicked in something fierce. Of course, terrorizing me was exactly the point. I was being treated as if I were an inmate there.

I spoke to other advocates who told me they had similar experiences in state hospitals when they were looking into things that staff didn't want to be seen. And the next day I learned that the hospital's official story was that I had come into the nurses' station yelling and screaming, that I had refused to identify myself, and that I had threatened the ward psychiatrist. Yes, I'm sure she felt threatened by the idea that someone was concerned about her abuse of these kids. I was told that the hospital police (who are just untrained staff designated by the hospital director) were about to be called just before I left.

A child is pepper-sprayed

How endangered I had been became clear when I found out that, in mid-August, there had been what the hospital described as a "riot" on one of the boys' wards. Desperate, several kids had attacked staff members, and one staff person was hospitalized. Hospital police had been called in, and when one boy, clearly freaked out by the events, was threatening to cut his wrists, hospital police moved in and sprayed him at close range with pepper spray. He had a seizure, fell to the floor unconscious, and was hospitalized. If he had asthma, as L. did, or cardiac arrhythmia, as I do, he might well have died.

A few days later, I received still another report of a staff member being attacked and seriously injured. She was rescued by still another child, because her fellow workers were nowhere in sight. Clearly, the situation there is out of control when the hospital administration can't protect even their staff. I fear for the safety of the children in an institution where even the legally mandated advocates are kept from knowing what is going on.

California's state hospitals are being used more often to lock up people committed by the criminal justice system. As the population changes, these institutions, never humane in the first place, are becoming places of unspeakable cruelty. Patients languish for years, heavily drugged and treated like subhumans, transformed into burned-out shells of human beings whose only function is to consume powerful (and profitable) psychiatric drugs.

Into this virtual death camp of the spirit, Los Angeles County and the State Department of Mental Health have placed scores of children. These kids need love and nurturing, but all the mental health system can offer them is drugs and despair. And this publicly funded child abuse costs California taxpayers about $125,000 every year for every child.

Recently, I left my job with the Office of Patients' Rights because, since its funding comes entirely from the State Department of Mental Health, it can do very little about this situation. Working with the Coalition for Alternatives in Mental Health, which was organized in 1984 by myself and Sally Zinman, another psychiatric survivor, I will be starting a campaign in Los Angeles to bring the abuse of children at Metropolitan State Hospital to public attention.

We closed East Bay Hospital, we can close Metro's children ward!

Even the most dedicated advocates become numb after awhile to the abuses of the mental health system. We come to accept these inhumane institutions as a given, because we think there's nothing we can do about it. But I don't think it has to be this way. Just three months ago, East Bay Hospital, one of the most abusive psychiatric facilities in the state, was closed down after a campaign involving many people that began when articles in *Street Spirit* exposed what was going on.

Stopping the terrible mistreatment of psychiatric patients can be done, and we have to do it. The children's wards at Metropolitan State Hospital must be closed. I urge everyone who reads this to join with me and others who care about children to stop this cruelty. No human being should have to endure life in such institutions, but especially not children.

How You Can Help

- Make a tax-deductible contribution to: Coalition for Alternatives in Mental Health, 3234 Adeline Street, Berkeley, CA 94703. Indicate clearly your contribution is for the "Children's Project."
- Write, phone or email: Zev Yaroslavsky, Chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, 500 West Temple St., Suite 821, Los Angeles, CA 90012. Phone: (213) 974-3333. Email: Zev@bos.co.la.ca.us

Ask the supervisors to hold a public hearing on the conditions of children at Metropolitan State Hospital. Tell them to ask L.A. County Mental Health Director Areta Crowell why she sends children into such terrible conditions.

How Many More?

from page one

places that might be safe. You can't sleep at night in lit and public areas; you can't gather in parks at night; you can't sleep in vehicles. If the police — enforcing the law — find you, they roust you; and they don't care where you go, and your safety is not their concern. You're not offered anywhere to go. You're just ticketed or told to move, to wander, to vanish, unprotected, into the night.

We all know, too, that cheap places to stay in the city are vanishing. One by one the inexpensive hotels are being upgraded for tourists: the Carrillo, the Schooner Inn, the California, and now the Virginia. Only the Faulding is left, and the merchants downtown are trying to get that one shut down too.

Where do we think people can go or stay? Shelters? The county has provided one at the National Guard Armory for a few months in the winter, but only when the temperature drops below 40 degrees and the girls' volleyball league isn't playing. This year, though, Governor Wilson has vetoed funds to pay to use the Armory.

Of 34 beds at the Salvation Army, nine are for women. Transition House is mainly for families, but it sets aside six beds each for single men and women. The Rescue Mission is expanding its facilities, and there are no beds available to women. If you're a man, you can stay there for 10 nights each month, and that's all, unless you enter their religious rehabilitation program.

And that's it. A hundred or so beds for men, 15 for women — and most of those, on any given night, already occupied. Where could the murdered woman have gone? And yet we persist, madly, in our attempts to prevent, forbid and criminalize public sleeping and camping, as if the homeless had other choices.

The city and the county, then, have not only been remiss in their obligations to the indigent but *intentionally* cruel. The senseless laws forbidding the homeless to sleep, coupled with the refusal of local authorities to provide or finance year-round shelters, has regularly contributed to — I am tempted to use the word *caused,* but will not — immense human suffering and violence.

Just recently, for instance, the City Council removed the benches from the porch of City Hall. The homeless had found them — they were well-lit, in open view — safe places for sleeping. And *because of that,* they were removed.

Are there easy ways to put an end to this? Perhaps not. But surely we ought to be looking, actively, for answers. And we are not. Years ago local officials went through the motions of looking for a permanent site for a year-round shelter. A site could not be found then, but there's been no further attempt to find a site for even a temporary shelter, no attempt to think through the possibility of using a local park for sleeping, no serious thought given to designating an area where policemen might be nearby or on-site to protect sleeping people.

Nor has anyone thought, in these circumstances, about suspending our sleeping and camping ordinances and giving the homeless the right to shelter themselves against danger and the elements in ways that we can't or won't.

When our city attorney drafted the ordinance forbidding the idle to sit on our streets, he modeled it on a Seattle ordinance. But in Seattle the authorities could legitimately claim that they weren't prejudiced against the homeless because there, at night, people are allowed to sleep in the parks. No one here in Santa Barbara has suggested anything similar. We have *only* laws that exclude them.

Near the dead woman's body, we are told, lay a citation for illegal camping. It was dated August 8.

Such citations, city officials insist, are given to protect people from the dangers of the night. But how can such citations protect someone with nowhere to go? They simply deprive them of what rest and safety they can provide for themselves in the vacuum left by our indifference.

Did our laws play even a small part, even an indirect part, in the death of the woman just killed? Is what happened to her anything like what happened to my friend?

Maybe not; we'll probably never know. But what about those others still out there? What about those tonight, and every night, with nowhere to go, and for whom the police, because of our laws, are enemies rather than protectors, harriers rather than guardians? Will it matter to us if they are raped and killed, as several homeless men and women have been over the years?

It is about time for all those sickened by the no camping and sleeping laws, which deprive the homeless of the right to shelter themselves, to cry out, at last, against them, and also for permanent public shelters.

Deportation of Hundreds Looms in Eureka

from page two

them set up camps in this town."

Eighty percent of the South Spit residents are disabled, mentally or physically. There are about a dozen children. One-third of the community is female. Most of them have non-operational vehicles. Dr. Ring swears in her court declaration: "most... live in trailers which provide shelter from the weather, cooking and food storage facilities, and some security from theft and assault. Evicting people from shelter, however poor, in the face of oncoming winter weather, without providing an alternative will have detrimental effects on their health... and is not in any way justified by the medical facts."

Health Officer Lindsay asked for and got $55,000 from the County Supervisors for "homeless relocation" expenses, much of which was spent to staff a road-block gate with sheriffs, then security guards, and to euthanize or adopt out the residents' pets. Jetty residents were issued mandatory ID cards which are checked when they enter and leave. The security guards and ID checks at the armed and guarded gate create what many residents describe as an atmosphere of police-state surveillance and intimidation.

The police seem bent not only on evicting the long-standing homeless community from the Jetty, but persecuting them until they are forced to leave Eureka entirely. Dervin reports that she found Larry, who fled the Jetty earlier and now sleeps in an abandoned building, in tears on September 23. The former Jetty resident reported that police had threatened to take his dog and told him nobody from the Jetty was welcome in Eureka. He was given 10 days to get out of town.

Jinny Jernigan, 64, a homeless advocate for more than 10 years, was one of four additional social workers paid by the County to walk the South Spit Jetty as protective cover for the homeless removal. On September 23, she quit, disgusted with the County's activities, and swore out a declaration indicting the County for incompetence at best — the social workers had virtually no resources or information to give the Jetty residents.

Jernigan calls the County claims that they are housing homeless people with the allocated money "simply lies." A Health Department worker suggested to *Street Spirit* that the County had helped relocate over 130 people, a claim Dervin and Attorney Jan Turner said was knowingly false. Nardia, a resident on the Jetty, writes that her repeated attempts to get even a single application form from social workers were met with silence and that her family members have not been allowed past the armed and guarded gate.

The police harassment and upcoming expulsion violate a legal settlement between Humboldt County and the Jetty homeless community made on August 19, in which the County had signed off on an agreement to end harassment of the campers. It allowed the homeless community to stay on the federal property at the end of the Jetty unmolested, ending periodic police harassment through trespass tickets; the August settlement also ended a 1994 "public nuisance" lawsuit that police and county bureaucrats had been using to drive away "the undesirables." In return, the South Spit campers agreed to take care of the land and move to an alternate site when that became available.

Barely a week before the October 2 eviction deadline, Attorney Jan Turner filed a lawsuit demanding that the courts enforce the August settlement. She filed 28 declarations documenting that persons providing necessary medication, food, water, and transportation have been prevented from entering South Spit Jetty; that those on South Spit without picture ID have been unable to leave; and that the health "emergency" used to justify wholesale abrogation of constitutional rights is a pretext to facilitate state purchase of the Spit. Turner further contends that the state agency planning to purchase the property, the Coastal Conservancy, has refused to do so until campers have been removed; the Coastal Conservancy paid for the guard gate. Humboldt County's unilateral decision to blockade the homeless community on federal property also cuts access to a state beach and a county park.

Lindsay's "health emergency" tale fit in well with Humboldt County Supervisor Stan Dixon's plan to redevelop Humboldt Harbor by having the State of California buy the five-mile strip of property from Pacific Lumber and the Army Corps of Engineers, and turning it into a managed recreational area. The one sticking point: the State's Coastal Conservancy would not purchase the Pacific Lumber access road until all the homeless people were off the property. Rather than evict them straightaway and be forced to pay costly relocation fees, Dixon engineered a bill via State Senator Thompson authorizing the Coastal Conservancy to make a study and buy the spit.

Resident Jesse Katz writes, "I was living in Eureka and I moved out here to get away from the drugs and the police harassment of the homeless. I'm clean out here. For the large part we were chased out here, given no options. The Jetty is closer to a community than I ever found in Eureka. Kill me or take me to jail. I don't want either but I'm not afraid."

Seven-year resident Guy Keller writes, "I'm being held against my will, because I don't have ID. They will let me out, but they won't let me back in." Fourteen-year-old Meredith Giles writes, "My mom has asthma, emphysema, and her kidneys are failing. I feel like I'm more free here than anywhere else in the world. When all this started happening, I felt like I was a prisoner, that I was more of a number than a person. It didn't feel like America, that I was trapped in some other country."

James Darpino, who lives at South Spit with his wife and two children and has one of the few operational vehicles, writes of the "simple but beneficial way of life" with "people tightly knit." "The unity here has a bond so strong that nobody goes without food, without water, or any of the basic necessities of life."

Merv Jensen, reporter for *Homeward,* a Sacramento homeless newspaper, spent four days in Eureka in September. After speaking with County Health officials and Jetty residents, he saw the County's anti-homeless campaign as "some sort of a far-fetched land deal, an immoral, unfeeling, and remorseless effort." He was so struck with the injustice of the situation that he returned to the Jetty after filing his story to be with residents when police move in to uproot the community (currently scheduled for early October).

Lurch, who has been homeless in Santa Cruz and Santa Barbara, says that the "homeless out here aren't activists or protesters; we're losing it because of that." Phil, disabled and from a well-to-do family, writes: "The family out here on the Jetty is more important than my own family because they need more." Eleven-year-old Chris, a fifth grader, said: "I feel like something is going to happen, like there is going to be a big storm or something."

There is virtually no housing available for under $300; the Eureka Housing Authority has a long waiting list and does background checks, and only slumlords will rent to people without rental references, which homeless people obviously do not have. Trailer parks won't admit those trailers still mobile on the Jetty because they are too old. The County has refused even to supply gas money so people can seek housing on their own. Eureka bars overnight sleeping in vehicles.

Said vehicular resident and mother Susan Dunn: "There are lots of people with disabilities; that's why they're here. They can't work any more. There are people who have injuries; they can't walk far. Others are on crutches, probably for the rest of their lives. They will not be able to walk to the free meal, and the places they need to go. Social Services used to send these people to the Jetty because there is nowhere to go. On the Jetty, the people are much better off. The mentally ill are relatively safe. People on the Jetty have formed a real community... a church, and a playground."

Humboldt County officials ignored the recommendations of two County Grand Juries for the creation of a permanent homeless shelter, and refused to ratify an affordable housing element which would allow for zoning for shelters and campgrounds. This failure endangers future federal funding, which the County is apparently willing to sacrifice in its disdain for the homeless, according to Rev. Eric Duff, a concerned local citizen.

Ruben Botello, a writer on the Internet who has organized two protests supporting the South Spit Jetty community, has written the County Grand Jury, denouncing local expenditures on a huge new empty jail, a brand new courthouse, and a "Taj Mahal" library that is now largely closed because the County can't pay for staff. He sees a $20 million Humboldt Harbor dredging and gentrification project lurking behind the South Spit land grab.

String, a veteran on disability with a broken back, asks: "They're closing down the military bases; why can't the homeless go there and try to make a living? Why don't they let us go in some of those ghost towns or abandoned homes and let us fix them up?"

Merle Adams, an Apache-American veteran who has lived on the Jetty off and on for 10 years, simply says: "I had a dream three times. It was the same dream — that I got shot. I ain't got no place to go. I'm willing to die for my land."

On Friday, September 26, Judge Buffington issued an injunction delaying eviction of the Jetty residents until after a court hearing on October 10. The armed guard and the roadblock remain, but guards have been instructed that they can't keep out people bringing in food and medicine or visiting relatives. Guards also are limited in their searches and can't keep people from leaving.

To get to the South Spit Jetty by land, take the Lolita turnoff from US 101, south of Eureka.

Death of a Child

from page two

his attention: What killed the fish? In an article in the *Willits News,* dated August 20, were reports of unprecedented loss of fish life in Baechtel Creek (an extension of Muir Mill Creek).

Calls to the director of the North Coast Water Quality Board, the Mendocino Environmental Health Department, and the County Health Department revealed that rivers and streams in Mendocino County are not routinely tested for the presence of chemicals, only bacteria.

Remco Hydraulics, Inc., which has large timber holdings in the Willits area, was fined recently, and ordered to do environmental clean-up. In addition to diesel fuel and volatile organic compounds, Remco was ordered to clean up chromium — which is highly poisonous. But even with the death of a child, none of these agencies have tested for chromium in the stream, or any other chemicals for that matter. They don't even have the facilities to do such testing.

Did Forrest die because of poisons in the creek? The only chemical testing done by Howard Memorial Hospital in Willits and Lt. Broin of the Mendocino Coroners Office was for the presence of illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroin. The police investigation of the site where the family was staying was limited to determining the house was not being used as a methamphetamine lab.

Forrest died of hypovolemia caused by internal bleeding, yet he had no signs or marks of any external injury. But what caused the bleeding? What role did the lumber companies' stands upstream in Muir Mill Creek have, if any, in his death? Although housed at the time of his death, what part did Forrest's past homelessness play in his death? If his family had had adequate housing during his short life, would he be alive today?

Perhaps we can comfort our discomfort by concluding that there was something wrong with Forrest. That he had a congenital weakness (a mild form of hemophilia). Or that, well, it is sad, but life is just sad sometimes. Or perhaps the death of Forrest is an urgent message for us all.

Families should be able to have homes to live in. All our children should have their needs for food, shelter, and health care met. How can we tolerate allowing any of our children to be homeless in the midst of great wealth? How can we allow our forest streams to become so polluted, a few swallows of water can kill a small child?

Where is our bottom line? What next will we tolerate? I don't know the answers to these questions. What I do know is this: The death of a child is the worst.

If you would like to help John Hernandez and Leslie Scales in their investigation of possible environmental poisoning in connection with the death of their son Forrest, please leave a message at (408) 425-3220 or write at: P.O. Box 7245, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

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